

**A ROOM OF HER OWN
HOUSING FOR NEW YORK'S WORKING WOMEN, 1875-1930**

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
Columbia University
May, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people involved in making this thesis a reality.

To my advisor, Andrew S. Dolkart, whose door was always open to me through this challenging process. Thank you for your patience, enthusiasm, and especially your knowledge of tenements and hotels in New York City.

My readers, Carol Clark and Jessica Williams, thank you for your encouragement and constructive suggestions.

To the archivists and librarians at New York Historical Society and Barnard College, thank you for your generosity. To the staff at Jeanne d'Arc Residence, thank you for giving me a detailed tour of your building.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my parents, Min and Fei. Thank you for always trusting and supporting me.

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INTRODUCTION

The large influx of country girls and the increasing number of immigrants together expanded New York's female labor community rapidly during the Gilded Age.¹ Although lives of working-class women were often a hard, bitter struggle, both in the home and in waged labor, urban life created a space in which some women could experiment with new roles.² The lifestyle of working women embodied one aspect of a larger cultural transformation occurring in the Progressive Era, a time when numerous voices questioned the inviolability of women's traditional sphere.³ Women formed professional networks and founded labor associations for mutual support; their massive mobilization for suffrage and temperance, as well as their visibility in radical politics, signified a new scale of participation in public life.⁴

By 1825, New York City had achieved commercial dominance in the United States. Its port handled nearly half the nation's imports and a third of its exports. In the same year, the opening of the Erie Canal, which connected the Hudson River to the Great Lakes system and hastened the development of a truly national market, secured New York's status as America's largest

¹ The Gilded Age refers to the period in U.S. history spanning from the 1870s to the turn of the twentieth century. This period featured "the massive industrialization of the eastern seaboard, increased immigration from Europe, and the unscrupulous business practices of the robber barons in the railroad and heavy industries." The term also indicates the flaunting wealth of the rich that contrasted with the destitute of workers; see, James S. Olson, and Abraham O. Mendoza, *American Economic History: A Dictionary and Chronology* (Santa Barbara, CA.: Greenwood, 2015), 264.

² Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago Press, 1991), 63.

³ The Progressive Era was a period that lasted approximately from 1880 to 1929. Progressives aimed to reform the tense social system caused by rapid industrialization, immigration and political corruption. Particularly, many progressives advocated for a change in gender roles inside and outside the home, with women having a wider public role; see, Christine W. Heilman, "Progressive Era," *Class in America: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 2007): 650-653.

⁴ Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusement: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 183.

city.⁵ Manufacturing within the city was stimulated by its commercial trade, with merchant capitalists developing products like readymade clothing, to answer the need for goods and services arising from the city's burgeoning population.⁶ Many young, unmarried women were assimilated into the city's labor force, driven by employment opportunities created by the expanding mercantile and manufacturing economy.

Considering issues of safety, welfare and protection, it may come as a surprise for a woman to make an argument in favor of the nineteenth-century urban life. According to Carolyn Brucken's article *In the Public Eye: Women and the American Luxury Hotel*, the threatening nature of public space for women was symbolized by the gaze of strangers. There always were men stationing themselves at the entrance to churches, concert rooms, and hotels, for the apparent purpose of "staring at every modest woman who may chance to enter."⁷ On the other hand, by reclaiming the city as a space of female enjoyment through literary evidence, Elizabeth Wilson reestablished a positive connection between women and the public realm. She is concerned to document how assumptions about women's roles have shaped urban built forms, how women were among the marginalized groups who negotiated cities in their own ways, and how particular interpretations of sexuality are encoded into urban plans. A further aim is to reclaim life in large metropolitan areas as advantageous to groups as women. Urban life, as Wilson argued, has emancipated women and allowed difference to exist and even flourish.⁸

⁵ George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 67.

⁶ Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusement: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 35.

⁷ Carolyn Brucken, "In the Public Eye: Women and the American Luxury Hotel," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31 (1996): 203-220.

⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life the Control of Disorder and Women* (London: Virago, 1991), 76.

Despite the dehumanizing working system in garment factories and sweatshops, laundries, box factories, department stores, artificial flower factories, etc., the city's diversified commercial recreations encouraged working women to express their aspiration for selfhood and fulfillment. Of all the amusements that bedazzled single working women, dancing proved to be her greatest passion. According to studies from the Committee on Amusement and Vacation Resources of Working Girls, by the 1910s, over five hundred public dance halls opened their doors each evening throughout greater New York, and more than one hundred dancing academies instructed 100,000 neophytes yearly in the latest steps.⁹ During the summertime, thousands of working girls would be found either in the position of compulsory idleness through slack season in the trades, or attempting to kill time through one or two weeks of a vacation.¹⁰ The range of summer amusements around New York City included beach resorts, amusement parks, the summer night's festival, the excursion boat, the vacation home or camp provided by settlements, churches, and girls' clubs.¹¹ Working-class women also embraced dime novels, fashion and film products and used them to create distinctive and pleasurable social practices and to enact identities as ladies.¹² When tens of thousands of working women went on strike in New York City in 1909, their shared culture and participation in ladyhood, provided identities and languages from which to establish themselves as political actors.¹³ Known as the Uprising of the 20,000, the strike signified the union's multiethnic membership.¹⁴ In all, nearly 30,000

⁹ Michael Marks Davis, *The Exploitation of Pleasures: A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City* (New York: Department of Child Hygiene of the Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), 15.

¹⁰ Belle Lindner Israels, "The Way of the Girl," *Survey* 22 (July 3, 1909): 494.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 202.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁴ Margaret Chin, *Sewing Women: Immigrants and the New York City Garment Industry* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 11.

workers struck, including 21,000 Jewish women and 2,000 Italian women, mostly immigrants, as well as 1,000 American-born women and 6,000 men.¹⁵

Dedicated to women's collective experience in the metropolis, my thesis consists of a survey and study of housing for self-supporting women in Manhattan, from 1875 to 1930; an analysis of why women's residences have diminished; and a discussion of feasible preservation strategies for adapting and reusing those buildings in a way sensitive to the historical context, as well as increasing the public's awareness of women's residences in the city. These buildings offered single working women a place to live in the city, thus helping them subvert the role as dutiful daughters dependent on the patriarchal family.

Traditionally, women's history has been underrepresented, not only in textbooks but also in our built environment. Moreover, existing preservation projects on women's heritage often focus on the individual rather than the collective and accumulative accomplishments of women.

Therefore, it is important to designate and preserve women's residences that commemorate the struggles and opportunities of working women in urban America.

¹⁵ Lewis Levitzki Lorwin, *Women's Garment Workers: A History of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924), 149.

CHAPTER ONE: WOMEN'S OCCUPATIONS AND LIVING CONDITIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

In eighteenth-century American society, single women living completely on their own were virtually absent. Laboring women lived and worked primarily within the sphere of family and depended on the system of household production.¹⁶ When Harriet Martineau visited the United States in 1834, she found but seven employments open to women: teaching, needle work, keeping boarders, work in cotton mills, type-setting, book-binding, and household service.¹⁷ However, as early as 1820, American women were actually employed in at least seventy-five different kinds of manufacturing establishments, and in 1832 women employees were found in about twenty other industries.¹⁸ In 1864, among the 6,422 women applicants for employment to the New York Working Women's Protective Union, there were representatives of fifty different trades or occupations.¹⁹

American women began to work outside the home in significant and increasing number after 1875; until well into the twentieth century, most of these pioneering workers were the daughters of the working class.²⁰ As the progressive mechanization and rationalization of industry created a variety of light and unskilled jobs for low-wage labor, women extended their social boundaries, and New York City offered constant opportunities for this extension. By the 1890s, new jobs in department stores, large factories and offices provided women with alternatives to domestic service, household production, and sweated labor in small shops,

¹⁶ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789 – 1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 217.

¹⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837), 257.

¹⁸ Helen L. Sumner, *History of Women in Industry in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 17.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3.

which had dominated women's work earlier.²¹ Based on Alba Edward's census monograph, from 1870 to 1930, it is clear that manufacturing and domestic service had growth rates lower than the average rate for the non-agricultural labor force and thus had declining shares of total employment over the period;²² transportation and communication, trade, professional, and clerical occupations all exhibited growing shares of female non-agricultural employment with growth rates far above the average (Figure 1.1).²³ Evidence of the growing professionalism of women can also be found in numerous books published as guides to future occupations, such as Ella Rodman Church's *Money Making for Ladies* (1882), George J. Manson's *Work for Women* (1883), Martha L. Rayne's *What Can a Woman Do* (1884), *Occupations for Women* (1887) edited by Willard, Winslow and White, and Alden's *Ways of Earning Money* (1904).

²¹ Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusement: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 35.

²² Elyce J. Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870-1930* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 27.

²³ Alba M. Edwards, *Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870-1940*, U.S. Bureau of the Census (Washington D.C.: G. P. O., 1943), 100, 109-129. Workers in the transportation and communication sector comprised of (1) aviators; (2) sailors and deck hands; (3) bus conductors; (4) steam railroad employees; (5) street railroad employees; (6) telegraph and telephone linemen; (7) telegraph, radio and telephone operators; (8) mail carriers; (9) postmasters; etc.

People involved in the trade sector were (1) auctioneers; (2) commercial travelers; (3) deliverymen; (4) retail dealers; (5) wholesale dealers, importers and exporters; (6) proprietors, managers, and officials; (7) salesmen and saleswomen (store); (8) bankers, brokers, and money lenders; (9) insurance agents, managers and officials; (10) real estate agents and officials; etc. Professional service referred to (1) actors, showmen, keepers of pleasure resorts; (2) Architects, artists, sculptors, and teachers of art; (3) chemists, assayers, and metallurgists; (4) clergymen, religious workers, social and welfare workers; (5) college presidents and professors, and teachers; (6) dentists; (7) lawyers, judges and justices; (8) physicians and surgeons; (9) photographers; (10) technical engineers; (11) trained nurses; etc. Clerical occupations included (1) agents, collectors and credit men; (2) bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants; (3) clerks; (4) messengers, errand and office boys and girls; (5) stenographers and typists.

Occupational Distribution of Female Non-Agricultural Labor Force, 1870-1930

Female Non-Agricultural Labor Force	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	Compound Growth Rates 1870-1930
Forestry and Fishing	0	0	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0	3.76
Mining	0	0	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.01	4.44
Manufacturing and Mechanical Industries	24.90	32.54	32.65	31.87	29.04	25.85	19.17	2.78
Transportation and Communication	0.07	0.18	0.55	0.97	1.84	3.00	2.86	9.77
Trade	1.28	2.82	4.41	6.88	7.54	9.00	9.78	6.79
Public Service	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.77	0.14	0.18	8.32
Professional Service	6.44	8.74	9.74	10.07	11.72	13.62	15.50	4.79
Domestic and Personal Service	67.12	55.32	50.17	45.30	40.36	29.29	32.31	1.98
Clerical	0.13	0.35	2.40	4.32	9.39	19.04	20.19	12.28

Figure 1.1: Source: Edwards, Alba M., *Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870-1940*, U.S. Bureau of the Census (Washington D.C.: G. P. O., 1943), 100.

Garment workers and factory hands constituted the greatest bulk of New York's working women, but usually, they were also the most unfortunate (Figure 1.2-1.4). During the Gilded Age, New York City became the nation's biggest clothing-making center: one third of city residents struggled to make a living in the garment business.²⁴ In 1868, of the approximately 70,000 working women in New York, 25,000 labored in the needle trades.²⁵ In 1910, New York

²⁴ Esther Crain, *The Gilded Age New York, 1870-1910* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2016), 35.

²⁵ *25th Annual Report of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor* (New York: New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, 1868), 45.

City furnished nearly 400,000 of the upwards of 5,000,000 self-supporting women in the entire country; the city controlled America's clothing trade and utilized in its manufacturing the services of 120,000 people, of whom 70,000 were women.²⁶ Employees in the clothing trade were paid almost entirely by the piece; a weekly wage paid to beginners was around three dollars while the average was between four and seven dollars.²⁷ Many factories were poorly adapted to the comfort or convenience of the worker, and most girls worked amidst the chaotic conditions, material in all stages of completion being heaped up everywhere.



Figure 1.2: Making hats for the wholesale trade, early twentieth century. The New York Public Library.

²⁶ Annie Marion Maclean, *Wage-Earning Women* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1910), 31-32.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 34.



Figure 1.3: Group of women sorting chocolates, early twentieth century. The New York Public Library.



Figure 1.4: Table in an artificial flower factory, early twentieth century. The New York Public Library.

Once the single most important public amenities for women was the department store. It imposed a new, very American form of democracy, in which everyone was equal as long as they had the money to pay; even poor women enjoyed the stores' big, carefully decorated

windows, with displays that changed regularly.²⁸ Consumerism within the city was at full blast, exemplified by the opening of the Ladies' Mile Shopping District. Centered on Broadway between 14th and 23rd streets, this glamorous stretch was lined with multilevel, windowed emporiums such as Lord & Taylor and Arnold Constable that catered to the material desires of a new class of prosperous women. Dry-goods magnet A. T. Stewart pioneer in the department store in 1846 when he opened his store, the "Marble Palace," at the corner of Broadway and Reade Street. As Stewart's profits increased from thriving wholesale and retail operations, he built a second store at Broadway and Ninth Street in 1862, which occupied an entire city block (Figure 1.5). The third emporium was established in 1868, which hired more than one thousand sewing and shop girls (Figure 1.6).²⁹ In 1882, it was reported that almost 20,000 girls were employed in the city's stores, with Macy alone employed five hundred.³⁰ In 1896, the Chicago-based Siegel-Cooper Company opened its first store in New York City, which was known as the "big store" on Sixth Avenue between Eighteenth and Nineteenth Streets. At its peak, the store employed more than 3,000 people, most of them were female (Figure 1.7).³¹

²⁸ Gail Collins, *America's Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines* (New York: William Morrow, 2003), 241.

²⁹ "A. T. Stewart. He Opens a New Shop Up Town in New York," *The Louisville Courier Journal*, Dec 4, 1868.

³⁰ "New York Shop Girls," *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, Mar 1882.

³¹ Joyce Mendelsohn, *Touring the Flatiron: Walks in Four Historic Neighborhoods* (New York: New York Landmarks Conservancy, 1998): 90-92.

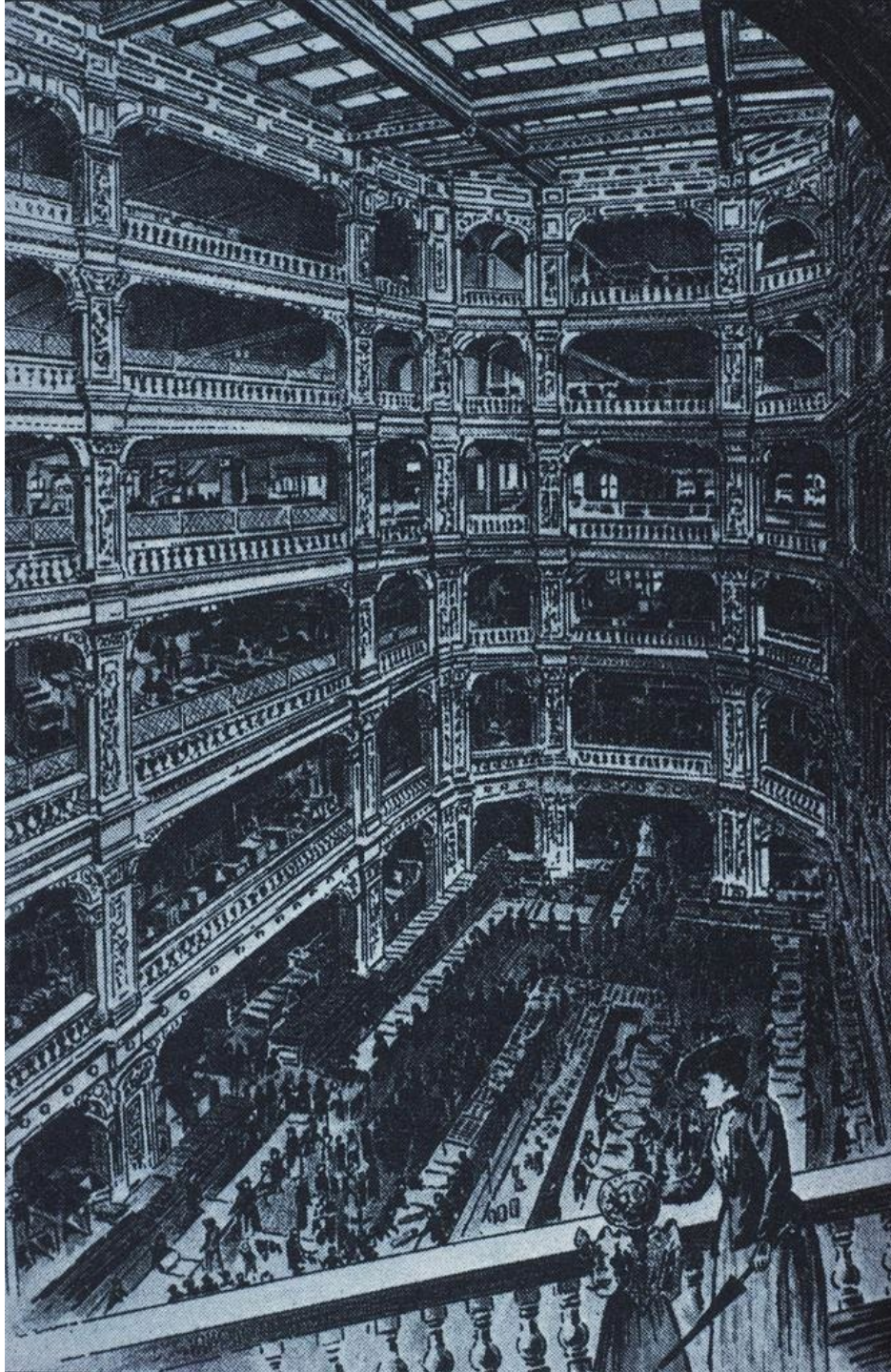


Figure 1.5: A.T. Stewart's "New Store," 1862. University of California, San Diego.



Figure 1.6: Sewing room at A.T. Stewart's department store, 1875. University of California, San Diego.



Figure 1.7: Sales Checking Department. Siegel Cooper Dry Goods Company, 1906. 294 6th Ave. & 18th St. Museum of the City of New York.

Up to 1850, the only real profession into which women had entered was teaching in the common schools and seminaries.³² The supposedly superior ability of women teachers to nurture the young, especially when it came to children in the lower grades, along with the supposedly “natural” role of women teachers as assistants to men, clearly preoccupied many nineteenth-century public school promoters (Figure 1.8, 1.9). In 1896, it was reported that ninety per cent of employed women college graduates were teachers.³³ By 1900, the United States had 325,000 women school teachers – 73.4% of the total.³⁴



Figure 1.8: The Infant Class, 1882. The New York Public Library.

³² Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* (New York, N.Y., and Lancaster, PA.: The Science Press, 1929), 470.

³³ Alison L. Prentice, and Marjorie R. Theobald, *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 120.

³⁴ Geraldine Joncich Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 40.



Figure 1.9: East side public school, ca. 1890. Museum of the City of New York.

Nursing was another lucrative profession opened to women, to which not much objection was raised. During the decade before the Civil War and the decade that followed it, New York had become intensely aware of the necessity for more and better hospital services. Almost all the large institutions for the care of the sick that are still in operation in the city date from this period. The New York Medical College for Women was founded in 1863, for the multiple purpose of affording facilities for the education of women in science and the practice of medicine, and the dissemination of laws of life and health by lectures and practical instruction to nurses, and of establishing and maintaining a general hospital for women and children (Figure 1.10, 1.11).³⁵ The Training School for Nurses attached to Bellevue Hospital opened in New York in 1873, the first school in United States to be run according to Florence Nightingale's

³⁵ "The New York Medical College for Women," *New York Evangelist* 39 no.37 (Sep 10, 1868): 1.

nursing principles (Figure 1.12).³⁶ On general hospital boards, usually of the smaller or middle-sized institutions, women were sometimes found in positions of equality with men, sometimes holding auxiliary posts.³⁷ In 1916, there were over five thousand graduate nurses in greater New York.³⁸

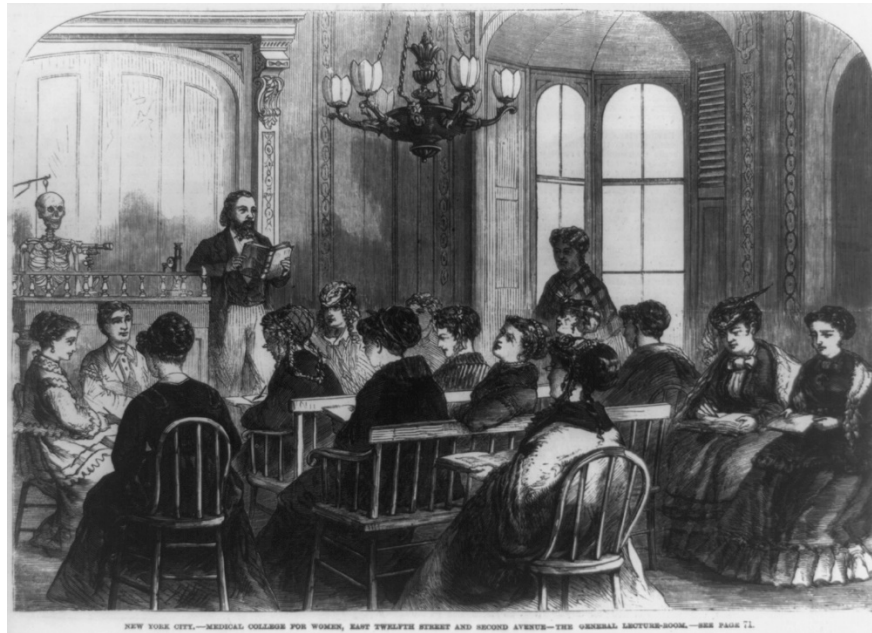


Figure 1.10: *The General Lecture Room. The New York Medical College for Women, East Twelfth Street and Second Avenue, 1870. Library of Congress.*

³⁶ Dorothy Giles, *A Candle in Her Hand; a Story of the Nursing Schools of Bellevue Hospital* (New York: Putnam, 1949), 233.

³⁷ M. Adelaide Nutting, and Lavinia L. Dock. *A History of Nursing: The Evolution of Nursing Systems from the Earliest Times to the Foundation of the First English and American Training Schools for Nurses* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 2.

³⁸ *Hodge's New York Nurses Directory* (New York: Hodges' Publishing Co., Inc., 1916), 1.



Figure 1.11: *The Anatomical Lecture Room. The New York Medical College for Women, East Twelfth Street and Second Avenue, 1870. Library of Congress.*



Figure 1.12: Bellevue Hospital in Blackwell's Island (Roosevelt Island), ca. 1896. Museum of the City of New York.

Most people tend to think that historically women artists were rare. However, after surveying the cultural landscape of New York City, women artists were found everywhere, studying and working in many branches of the field. Through the nineteenth century, the number of American women in the arts grew continuously and took a giant leap forward in the 1880s, a trend that was to continue.³⁹ It was estimated that, in 1880, there were five hundred women artists in New York City, four fifth of whom devoted their efforts to the various departments of decoration; the author also noted that "in nearly every New York studio building, there are several lady artists, amateur and professional."⁴⁰ The Woman's Art School of New York, opened as a private independent association in 1852 and merged with Cooper Institute in 1859, was a pioneer in the field of industrial art. Under the patronage and supervision of some female philanthropists, the school's mission was to open a new pathway for women unable and unwilling to become mere drudges in servile occupations, or "sell themselves at the matrimonial altar."⁴¹ After its opening, scores of young women headed for New York City and careers as artists. Many of these aspirants came from the city itself or crossed the Hudson River by ferry from New Jersey, while the majority were young women who travelled from upstate and western New York, or from areas farther afield and settled in the city.⁴² Founded in 1892 by Ellen Dunlap Hopkins, a socialite, painter and philanthropist, the New York School of Applied Design for Women intended to instruct women students "in those lines of *practical* industry that relate to the art of design in contradistinction to pictorial art." Besides courses on the manufacturing of carpets and wallpaper, women students also had the chance to learn drafting

³⁹ Julie Graham, "Women's Artists' Groups: 1867-1930," *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no.1 (Spring - Summer 1980): 7-12.

⁴⁰ "Some Lady Artists of New York," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 3, no.2 (Jul 1880): 27.

⁴¹ "School of Design for Women, at the Cooper Union," *New York Times*, Aug 26, 1859.

⁴² April F. Masten, *Art Work: Women Artists and Democracy in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 2.

in an architect's office (Figure 1.13).⁴³ Equipped with practical skills and egalitarian aesthetics, women artists who emerged from art schools launched careers in multiple art fields – they worked independently for exhibition, on commission for publishers, and as wage earners for manufacturers (Figure 1.14).⁴⁴ Formed in 1868, New York's Ladies' Art Association aimed to assist women in establishing themselves as artists. It offered its members privileges of studio space, opportunities of exhibiting and selling their works, and valuable letters of introduction when going abroad.⁴⁵ Still, there were many cases where the opportunities to study were earned and maintained by teaching or some other form of laborious work. One young woman at the Cooper Union copied manuscript at night in order to draw by day.⁴⁶

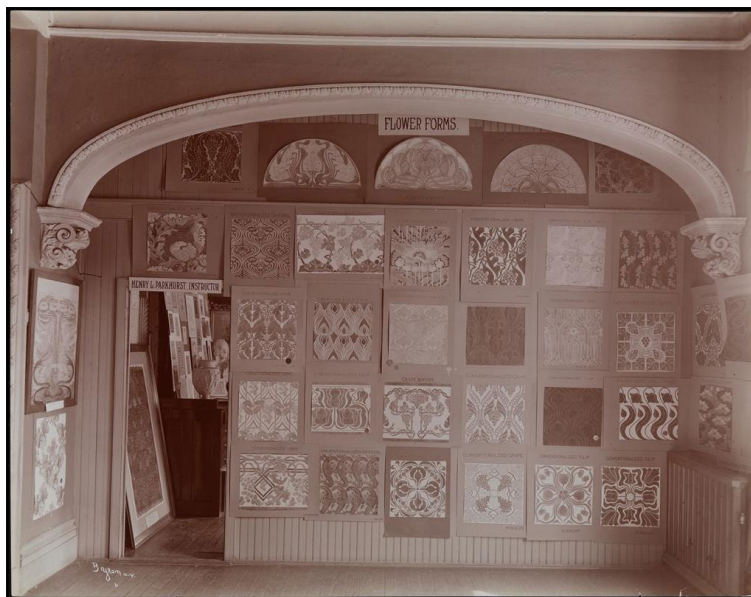


Figure 1.13: Design drawings for silk fabric exhibited at the New York School of Applied Design for Women, 1903.

Museum of the City of New York.

⁴³ "Schools of Applied Design," *Baltimore Sun*, Aug 4, 1892.

⁴⁴ April F. Masten, *Art Work: Women Artists and Democracy in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 3.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Dudley, "The Ladies' Art Association of New York," *The Aldine, the Art Journal of American* 8, no.5 (Sep 1, 1876): 151.

⁴⁶ "Young Artists' Life in New York," *Scribner's Monthly* 19, no. 3 (Jan 1880): 355.



Figure 1.14: 1913. Women working with patterns and mannequins in McCall Co.'s pattern design room. Museum of the City of New York.

As early as the mid-1880s, women began moving into metropolitan newspaper work in increasing number, and journalism began to be seen as a viable occupation for women in the U.S. in the 1890s.⁴⁷ "There is a large number of women in New York who support themselves by writing for the newspapers, daily or weekly; some are local, some write short sketches; others furnish long serial stories; many are book reviewers," wrote Rayne in her 1884 guide.⁴⁸

The profession of telegraphy was another one appealing to women, for a telegraph operator was considered to have a social position not inferior to that of a teacher or a governess.⁴⁹ In 1883, there were about two hundred women engaged in telegraphy. They were mainly employed by the Western Union Telegraph Company, and their salary ranged from twenty-five

⁴⁷ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 19.

⁴⁸ Martha Louise Rayne, *What Can a Woman Do; or Her Position in the Business and Literary World* (Detroit, Mich.: F.B. Dickerson & Co., 1885), 42.

⁴⁹ M. L. Rayne, *What Can a Woman Do; or, Her Position in the Business and Literary World* (Detroit, Mich.: F. B. Dickerson, 1885), 139.

to sixty-five dollars per month. Instruction in telegraphy had become a special feature in colleges, and the Cooper Union School of Telegraphy was preeminent.⁵⁰ The nationalization of training young women in wireless telegraphy was announced in 1917; the idea was to have women take the place of male operators during wartime.⁵¹ Once the field was accessible to women, radio-operating classes were opened at Marconi College, the Y.M.C.A. and Hunter College.⁵²

With the opening of a handful of women's colleges, a professional career was more accessible than ever for women. Opportunities for higher education for American women depended largely on the generosity of women like Sophia Smith and Indiana Fletcher Williams, who donated their money to found colleges for women. Designed to offer a rigorous academic program on par with that at the best men's colleges, women's colleges attempted not only to provide for the intellectual growth but also for the financial independence of women.⁵³ The academic excellence achieved by these women's colleges was crucial to proving women's intellectual capabilities. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were around two hundred and twenty-eight colleges of the liberal arts and one hundred and ninety-eight institutions for higher instruction that accepted women (Figure 1.15).⁵⁴ Those educated women played a leading role in creating enormous social changes, through organizing marches in the streets and lobbying legislatures, to improve women's lives (Figure 1.16).

⁵⁰ George J. Manson, *Work for Women* (New York: G. P. Putman, 1883), 21.

⁵¹ "Train Young Women in Wireless Telegraphy," *The Hartford Courant*, Jul 9, 1917.

⁵² "Wireless Telegraphy is New Field for Women, Government May Use Them," *Courier Journal*, July 22, 1918.

⁵³ Joan Marie Johnson, *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women's Movement, 1870-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017): 109-112.

⁵⁴ P. G. Hubert, "Occupations for Women," *The Woman's Book: Dealing Practically with the Modern Conditions of Home-Life, Self-Support, Education, Opportunities, and Everyday Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 2.

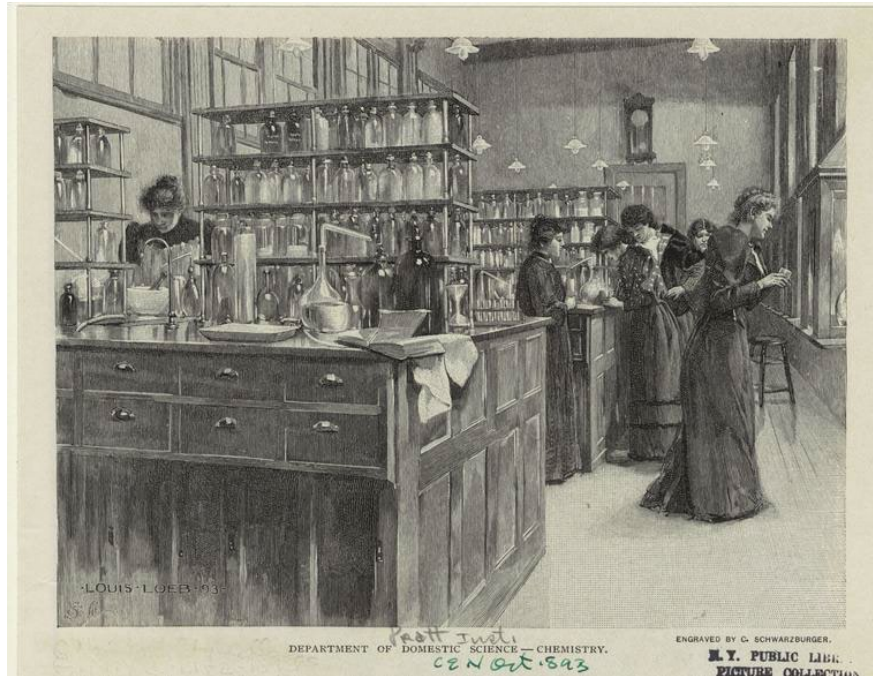


Figure 1.15: Department of Domestic Science – Chemistry. Pratt Institute, 1893. The New York Public Library.



Figure 1.16: College women marching in a suffrage parade in New York City, 1910. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

The industrializing city had offered numerous working opportunities for women of different class background. While seeking her fortune independently of her family, for most of them, life was not easy in New York. They rarely earned more than about half the wages of men, even oftentimes they did the same work as men's. During the 1880s, sixty cents was the average day's earnings of the 150,000 women and girls working in New York, but this included the cashier's two dollars a day, as well as the thirty cents of the girl who pulled threads in an East Side factory; and if anything, the average was probably too high.⁵⁵ "They live in nasty tenement houses, often in cellars. Their quarters are generally unfit for human habitation. Badly lighted, poorly ventilated, if clear air is accessible at all, their rooms are situated in pools of foulness, where every impurity is nurtured and where every vice flourishes," reported the *New York Herald* in 1869.⁵⁶ Moreover, many boarding-house keepers were loathed to accept women residents and did their best to avoid taking them; they believed that a woman was more burdensome than a dozen men, since she spent more time in the house and gave much more trouble than men.⁵⁷ Boarding houses took the place of pleasant homes; sometimes two young women, perhaps from the same town, formed a partnership to share it in common, while others just boarded on their own. Some struggling women, without proper accommodations, were lured into prostitutions.

Fearing the moral decadence of poor working women "adrift" in the city, churches and faith-based charity groups, for instance the St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, the Salvation Army

⁵⁵ Jacob A Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), 234.

⁵⁶ "Our Working Women," *New York Herald*, November 27, 1869.

⁵⁷ Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis; a Mirror of New York* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1869), 548.

and the Young Women's Christian Union, began to rent or build homes, where girls with limited means could live and receive meals at a very low rate.

CHAPTER TWO: RESIDENCES FOR WORKING WOMEN

2.1 Multi-Unit Dwelling in New York City

Beginning in about 1850, the influx of foreign immigrants and rural migrants into American cities overwhelmed the available housing facilities.⁵⁸ As James McCabe noted in *New York by Sunlight and Gaslight*, “The immense population of New York, and the scarcity of house room in the thick settled portions of the city, have given rise to a system of dwellings fortunately unknown in other cities of the country. These are known as tenement houses, and are simply vast barracks...”⁵⁹ How to pack as many human beings as possible into a lot, usually of 25 feet wide by 100 feet deep, with a minimum of light and air, seemed to be the foremost principle considered by landlords.⁶⁰ A single tenement of the ordinary type, built five stories high, lodged from sixteen to twenty-four families; as for double houses built up in the rear, there were often found thirty and occasionally forty families.⁶¹ The boardinghouse was another variant of multi-unit dwelling in New York City (Figure 2.1). “In *boardinghouses*, tenants rent rooms and the proprietor provides family-style breakfasts and evening dinners in a common dining room...In *private rooming houses*, tenants simply rent a room and buy their meals elsewhere. If tenants eat their meals with the family, they are called boarders; if tenants eat elsewhere, they are called roomers or lodgers.”⁶²

⁵⁸ John Modell and Tamara K. Hareven, “Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination and Lodging in American Families,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 35 no. 3 (Aug. 1973): 467-479.

⁵⁹ James D. McCabe, *New York by Sunlight and Gaslight. A Work Descriptive of the Great American Metropolis* (Philadelphia: Douglass Brothers, 1882), 559.

⁶⁰ “Plans for Tenement Houses,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 18 (May 1879): 155.

⁶¹ H. E. Pellew, D. Willis James, R. H. Derby and Stephen Smith, “New York Tenement-Houses,” *The Sanitarian* 7 (Mar, 1879): 107.

⁶² Paul Erling Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California. 1994), 7.

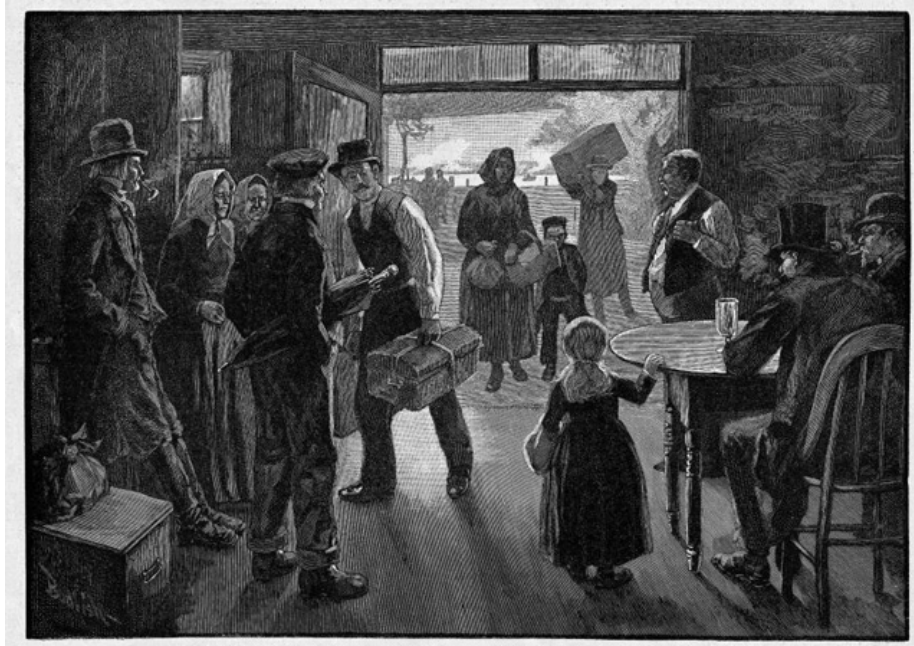


Figure 2.1: Arriving at an immigrant boarding house in New York. Harper's Magazine Co., 1886.

During this period, Jacob Riis, a journalist and social documentary photographer, drew attention to the appalling tenement condition and triggered government response (Figure 2.2). From Jacob Riis' reports, the state and federal governments realized that there was an urgency to regulate tenement buildings. In 1867, the New York Board of Health introduced the First Tenement House Act, which required that all new tenement developments install fire escapes as a mean of emergency exit and that each room have a window to allow for light and air. The window could open to the exterior or to an internal corridor. In 1879, the state legislature passed a new housing act that required all rooms have windows facing the street, rear yard, or an interior shaft. This new requirement gave rise to floor plans that resembled a dumbbell, and regrettably the shafts were so small that little air and light could be transmitted below the top floor.⁶³ The Tenement House Act of 1901 was a major revision to the previous housing acts. It

⁶³ Andrew S. Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2002), 55.

required windowless rooms in existing tenements to be refitted with an opening of a minimum of fifteen square feet into a ventilated room. New tenement developments were required to be built with windows in every room that faced a natural daylight and fresh air source, and have an open yard, indoor toilets, fire escapes, and garbage removal.⁶⁴



Figure 2.2: Sleeping lodgers or residents on the floor of a Gotham Court tenement. Photo by Jacob Riis, ca. 1900.

Museum of the City of New York.

Few houses or apartments in New York City were built for the accommodation of small middle-class families and bachelors, whose incomes were rarely sufficient to pay the rent of a four or five story houses.⁶⁵ In 1866, an article discussed such “embarrassments of the middle class,” a phenomenon also prevalent in Paris, Berlin and Vienna, and called for a housing scheme which

⁶⁴ Katy Chey, *Muli-Unit Housing in Urban Cities: From 1830 to Present Day* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 110.

⁶⁵ “The New Homes of New York: A Study of Flats,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 8 (May, 1874): 63.

would lessen the grand rent cost by dividing it among multiple families.⁶⁶ The Hotel Pelham in Boston, designed by Arthur Gilman and constructed in 1855, was one of the earliest apartment buildings in America. In 1869, Richard Morris Hunt, who returned from his architectural trainings in Paris, designed the Stuyvesant Apartments in New York, which appealed to stylish and wealthy tenants.⁶⁷

The bachelor apartment hotel, or bachelor flats, had been proposed and built in New York City by the 1870s, catering to cultured male tenants who were actively pursuing careers in the city.⁶⁸ Various social factors led to the growing number of single men: “the exclusion of women from most occupations; the greater number of male immigrants; postponement of marriage due to low income level; dissatisfaction with the institution of marriage; and the availability of alternatives, including socializing outside of marriage, the emergence of a gay male community, and the attractions of the heterosexual ‘supporting male culture.’”⁶⁹ In 1898, it was observed that “bachelor apartment houses began to arise one after the other, and each later one surpassing its predecessor in elegance, comfort and convenience.”⁷⁰ Those all-male bachelor flats were often constructed without public or private kitchens and they served mainly for sleeping, entertaining and reading (Figure 2.3, 2.4).⁷¹ In order to succeed, a bachelor apartment

⁶⁶ “Family-House for People of Small Incomes,” *New York Times*, Oct 19, 1866.

⁶⁷ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 136.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth C. Cromley, *Alone together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 188.

⁶⁹ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, “The Wilbraham Designation Report,” New York: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2004.

⁷⁰ “The Pierpont,” *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 61 (Feb 12, 1898): 283.

⁷¹ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 141.

hotel needed to be adjacent to the best life in the city, and its strongest rival was the man's clubhouse.⁷²

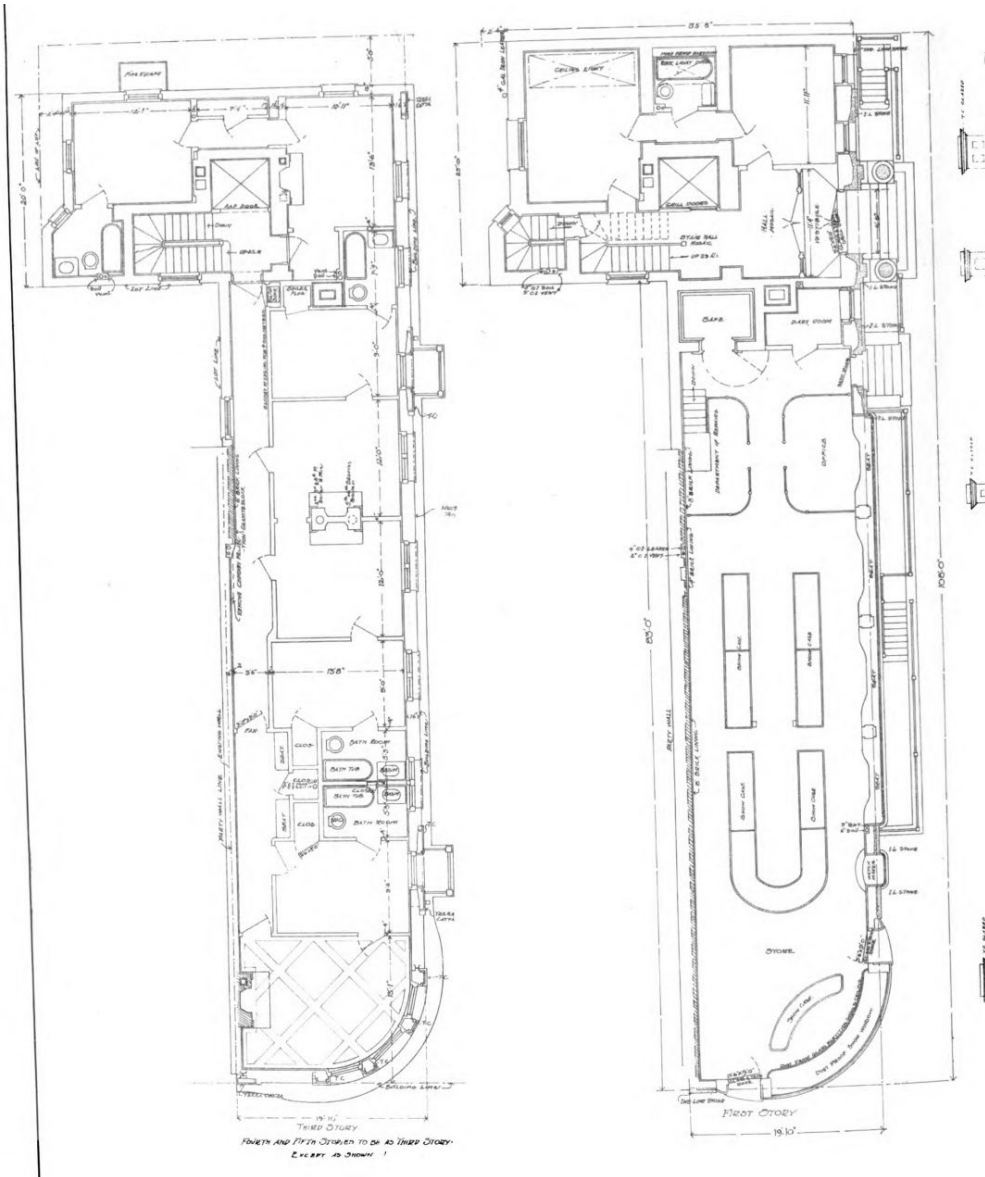


Figure 2.3: The Carlyle Chambers, a bachelor apartment house at Fifth Avenue and Thirty-eighth Street designed by Herts and Tallant. It had a jewelry store on the first floor; some two-room-plus-bath units had communicating doors for friends to share. *American Architect and Building News* 73 (Sept 21, 1901): pl. 1343.

⁷² "Bachelor Apartment Houses," *Real Estate Record* 75 (Jan 21, 1905): 131.

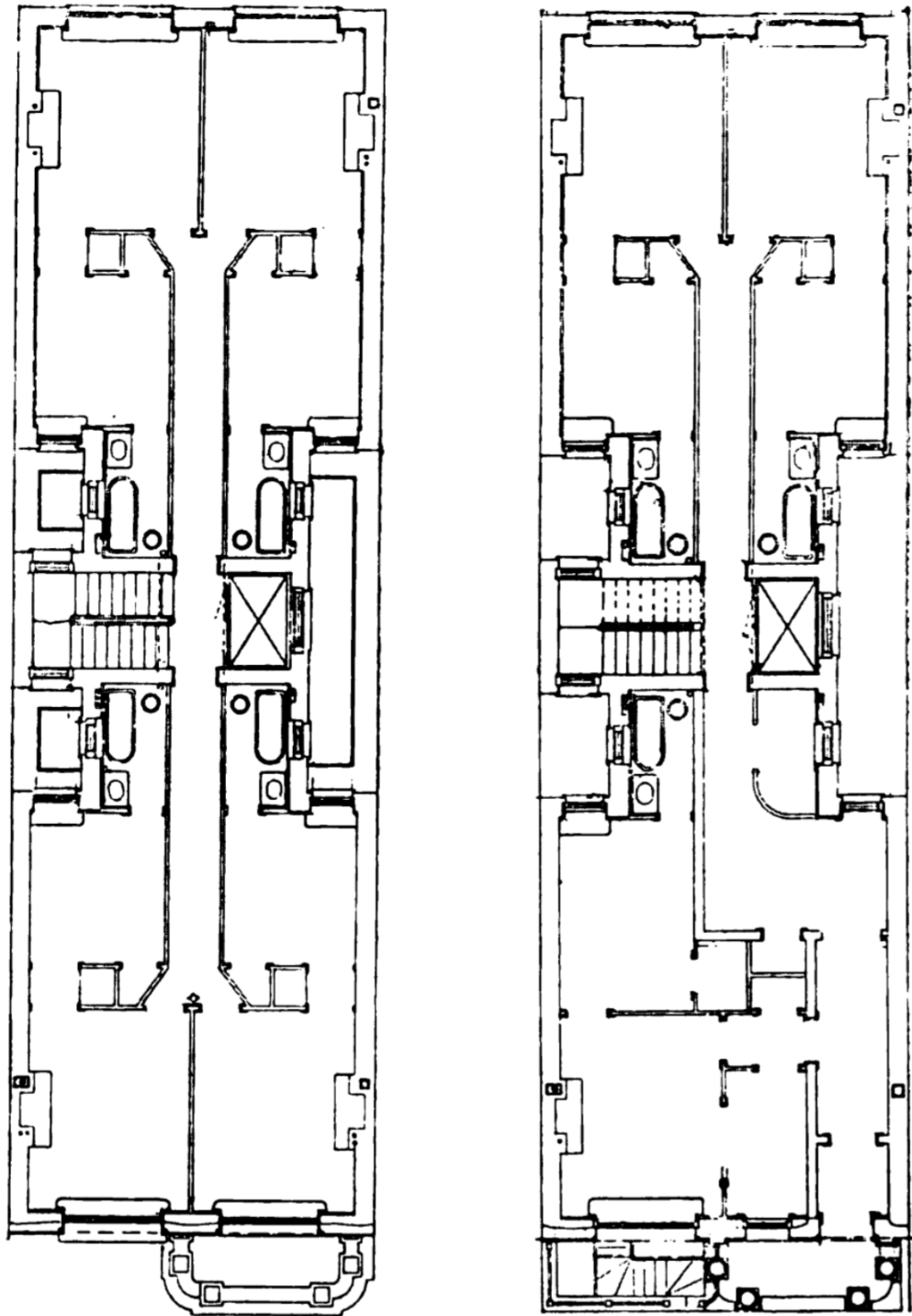


Figure 2.4: Floor plan of a bachelor apartment house at 119 West 45th Street. *Architectural Record* 11 (1901-1902): 507.

But for well-to-do bachelor girls, such single-sex apartments were not available. She might rent an artistic studio in a fancy building (Figure 2.5), where she could entertain “her Bohemian friends of the literary, musical, and art world, in blissful ignorance of that other young life utterly devoid of all youthful pleasures.”⁷³ For working-class girls, the usual method was to rent a room for about \$1.50 a week, and prepared her own “frugal” meals (Figure 2.6).⁷⁴



Figure 2.5: Photographer Jessie Tarbox Beals seated in her studio/living room, reading. 1920. The Schlesinger History of Women in America Collection.

⁷³ E. Idell Zeisloft, *The New Metropolis* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 289.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 2.6: “A working girl’s home. While eating her frugal meal, she meditates on the future.” E. Idell Zeisloft, *The New Metropolis* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 289.

In 1903, an editor of *Architectural Record* marked the “sudden and surprising popularity” of apartment hotels in New York City; in his/her opinion, this new class of residential accommodation was, in short, “a big, bold, 20th century boarding-house.” Unlike ordinary hotels, rooms of apartment hotels were rented by the year, and were usually arranged *en suite*, meaning the *suite* comprised of two rooms and a bath; while at the same time, almost all these apartment hotels kept their least expensive rooms single, but also sometimes contained large suites of three, four and five rooms along with several bathrooms. In the tone of a conservative, the editor deemed residents of apartment hotels to be business and social *Bohemians*, who “like a life in which restaurants and theatres play leading parts” but meanwhile “be more domestic than a smug suburbanite would suspect.”⁷⁵ In the 1920s, “the adverse effects of Prohibition on hotel economics,” together with “restrictions imposed by the Tenement House Law on the heights of apartment houses,” brought a resurgence of apartment hotel construction in New

⁷⁵ Ibid.

York. According to Robert Stern, among all those apartment hotels, “the most architecturally distinguished” ones were built purposely for young and unmarried working men and women.⁷⁶

2.2 Residences Exclusively for Women

Sexual tensions were omnipresent in the public space of New York City (Figure 2.7), as reflected by a young woman’s complaints published in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1857. While shopping on Broadway, men’s impudent and self-satisfied gaze constantly embarrassed her, and she suggested that the city provide “some peaceful retreat, where modest-minded and retiring women can enjoy an unmolested walk.”⁷⁷ Nor did the high expense of rooms necessarily ensure a safe or respectable environment for working women. Within the “privacy” of boarding house, its mixed company was considered to be a threat to the morals and manners of young women.⁷⁸



Figure 2.7: Men staring at every lady who passed in a hotel porch. *Appleton's Journal* 7 (Feb 1872): 224.

⁷⁶ Robert A. M. Stern, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rozzoli, 1987), 206.

⁷⁷ “Prattle and Tattle,” *Harper's Weekly* 7 (Jun. 1857): 382.

⁷⁸ “Boarding Out,” *Harper's Weekly* 7 (Mar. 1857): 146.

To the rescue of working women without proper accommodation, special hotels were built where female workers could live safely and inexpensively. As higher education and professional careers became accessible to women, there emerged hotels that provided a less restrictive but more refined environment.

Based on the class and national background of women residents, those buildings can be broken into four categories: non-profit homes for native-born working-class girls and for immigrant girls, commercial hotels for the middle-class, and clubhouses for more affluent women. For the analysis of each category, two to five buildings are selected, and the criteria is different from case to case (Figure 2.8). For instance, the Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home is chosen for it represents a phenomenon of Christian philanthropic groups spurting across the United States, while the Clara de Hirsch Home and the Y.W.H.A headquarter were built in response to Christians' anti-Semitism and reflected the Americanization of Jewish communities. In terms of the Martha Washington Hotel, it is significant as the first commercial hotel for working women. And the Allerton House for Women is selected because the Allerton Chain had built a series of hotels for men, from which a comparison can be drawn.

According to a current mapping of forty-seven women's residences, those buildings were not concentrating in a specific area of Manhattan, though the earliest ones, which were built for the working-class, were close to factories and department stores in Lower Manhattan (Figure 2.9).

Name	Year Built	Address	Owner/Developer	Architects	Landmarked	Current Use
Working Women's Hotel	1878	2 Park Avenue	A. T. Stewart	John Kellum	No (demolished)	/
Margaret Louisa Home	1891	14 East 16th Street	Young Women's Christian Association	Robert Henderson Robertson	Yes	Nightclub (proposed)
Jeanne d'Arc Residence	1912	253 West 24th Street	The Congregation of Divine Providence	Daus & Otto	No	Women's Residence
Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls	1899	225 East 63th Street	Baron de Hirsch Fund	Brunner & Tryon	No (demolished)	/
Young Women's Hebrew Association Building	1914	31 West 110th Street	Young Women's Hebrew Association	Janade & Abrahamson	No	Prison
Martha Washington Hotel	1903	29 East 29th Street	Women's Hotel Company	Robert W. Gibson	Yes	Hotel
Trowmart Inn	1906	607 Hudson Street	William R. H. Martin	Ralph Townsend	Yes	Apartment Building
Allerton Hotel for Women	1920	130 East 57th Street	Allerton Hotel Chain	Arthur Loomis Harmon	No	Hotel
Parkside Hotel	1927	18 Gramercy Park	Rosman Construction Corporation	Murgatroyd & Ogden	Yes	Apartment Building
Barbizon Hotel	1928	140 East 63rd Street	Lex Ave & 63 rd Street Corporation	Murgatroyd & Ogden	Yes	Apartment Building
Panhellenic House	1928	1-7 Mitchell Place	Panhellenic Association	John Mead Howells	Yes	Apartment Building
American Women's Association Clubhouse	1929	353 West 57th Street	American Women's Association	Morris & O'Connor	No	Hotel

Figure 2.8 Selected case studies.

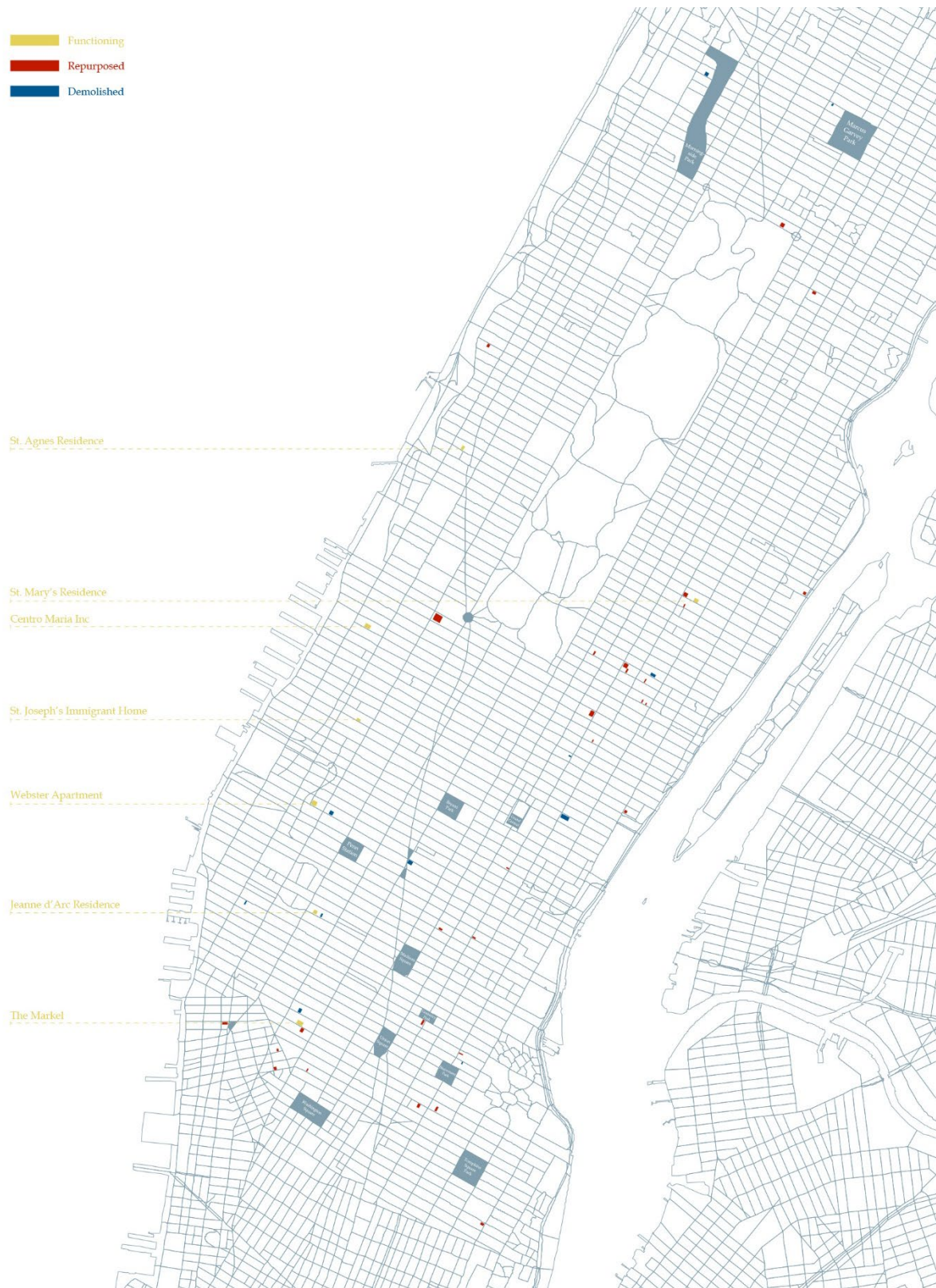


Figure 2.9 Mapping of working women's residences in New York City. Drawn by the author. April, 2019.

2.2.1 Semi-Charitable Hotels for Working-Class Women

One of the earliest examples was the Working Women's Home at Forty-five Elizabeth Street. Opened in 1867, it was under the care of the Trustees of the Five Points House of Industry.⁷⁹ The six-story structure was originally erected as a model tenement house, which proved to be a failure; several months after it opened, it was purchased by the corporation, in whose hands the building underwent a remarkable transformation.⁸⁰ In speaking of the principles and plans of the establishment, the trustees claimed the Working Women's Home was not a *charity* but a *business*, for the trustees "would be the last to injure legitimate business and degrade the laboring classes from their personal independence."⁸¹ The women who took board in the house were asked to pay at the rate of \$3.25 a week; if the Home was found to be more than self-supporting, the surplus revenue would be placed in the bank to the credit of permanent boarders.⁸² Half a year later, the house was filled with 173 boarders and the establishment managed to be self-sustaining.⁸³

Working Women's Hotel

Inspired by the success at Forty-five Elizabeth Street, two years later, dry-goods magnet A. T. Stewart devoted six million dollars to the erection of a hotel for female workers (Figure 2.10). Although the institution was categorized as a city *charity*, it was extravagantly designed to foster working girls' individuality and self-independence, which was seen as "next to purity of heart, the noblest thing in the class, and one well worth preserving."⁸⁴ The interior was painted

⁷⁹ "Working Women's Home," *New York Observer and Chronicle* 45 (Oct 1867): 318.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Working Women's Home," *New York Times*, Apr 3, 1868.

⁸⁴ "Mr. Stewart's Hotel for Working Women," *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art* 14 (Jul 3, 1869): 417.

pure white, the color of heaven, in contrast to the filthy and dark places poor girls used to stay.⁸⁵

Its first floor was designed to contain twenty-four stores, rents from which would materially assist in meeting the needs of the institution (Figure 2.11).⁸⁶ When the home finally opened in 1878, A. T. Stewart had already passed away; his wife decided the minimum rate for board should be six dollars a week. Mrs. Stewart was severely criticized for fixing the charges so as to exclude the poorest of working girls.⁸⁷ The home failed in a short time. To women who could afford its price, the rules were “oppressive and meddlesome.” For instance, the lights had to be turned off at a fixed hour; the piano and sewing machines were actually forbidden to use.⁸⁸



Figure 2.10: “Stewart’s Home for Working Women,” 1872. The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “The Women’s Hotel,” *Turf, Field, and Farm* 26 (Apr 1878): 217.

⁸⁸ “A Woman’s Hotel,” *St. Louis Post – Dispatch*, May 17, 1891.

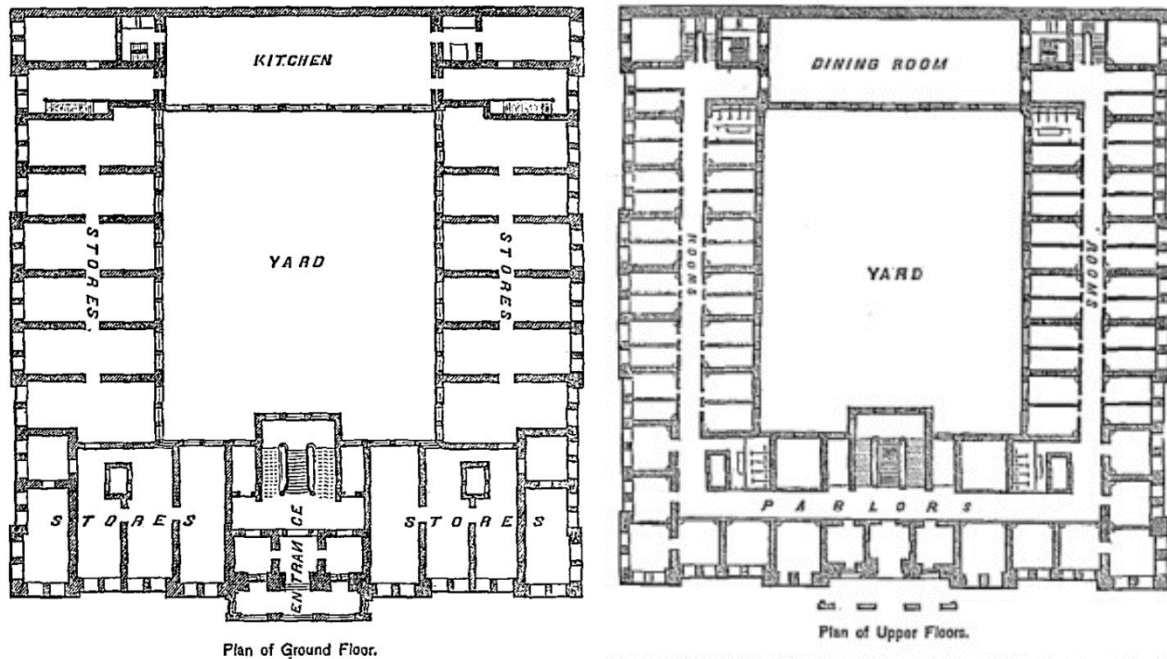


Figure 2.11: Plans of Ground Floor and Upper Floors, 1869. "Mr. Stewart's Hotel for Working Women", *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art* 14 (Jul 3, 1869): 417.

Margaret Louisa Home

The Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home was a rather successful establishment: the work of its laundry department increased from 198,653 pieces in 1891 to 600,000 pieces in 1903.⁸⁹ It was constructed in 1889-91, during the middle development phase of the Ladies' Mile District.⁹⁰ Its location at 14 East 16th Street was in the very heart of business and had direct communication with the main building of the association at 711 East 15th Street; both of them were designed by architect Robert H. Robertson. The home was a gift from Margaret Louisa Shepard, daughter of William H. Vanderbilt, who placed their operations under the auspices of the Young Women's

⁸⁹ *Margaret Louisa Home of the Young Women's Christian Association of the City of New York: 14 & 16 East Sixteenth Street* (New York: Young Women's Christian Association, 1904), 11.

⁹⁰ *Ladies' Mile Historic District: Designation Report* (New York: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1989), 430.

Christian Association.⁹¹ By the end of nineteenth century, middle-class reformers had established local branches of the Y.W.C.A. in almost every American city, and their activism focused chiefly on the uplift of working women. The organization provided the Rooms Registry Service, which evaluated and recommended available rooms for women who travelled alone or who were new to the city.⁹² The Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home was devised as a stopping place for Protestant, self-supporting women, who were strangers in the city and seeking employment. The limit of time for each guest was four weeks.⁹³ When there were vacancies, women who were not self-supporting but preferred the Home to a hotel, could be admitted for a short period of less than a week. For safety concerns, the Home enforced an 11:00 p.m. curfew; if a girl was to stay out late, a report at the Superintendent's office was required.⁹⁴

The building is six-stories tall, with a brownstone front in the Romanesque Revival style (Figure 2.12). Remarkably, air and light were admitted to every part of the house; no bedroom was dark and each had a large window for ventilation.⁹⁵ On the whole, the building's interior generated a sense of joyfulness and neatness. The walls and ceilings were painted in warm, soft colors which added charm to the house; the lower halls and restaurant had beautiful marble mosaic floors, and were lit by stained-glass windows; the parlors were furnished in accord with middle-class taste: it had a piano, book cases and reading lamps, giving a peculiar air of home-like comfort to these spaces (Figure 2.13, 2.14); bedrooms were not large but adequately equipped with a comfortable bed (Figure 2.15, 2.16); bathrooms were especially luxurious given

⁹¹ Susan Sunshine, "Woman and Home: A Hotel for Women", *Los Angeles Sunshine*, Dec 11, 1892.

⁹² Margaret Spratt, *Men and Women Adrift: the YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 87.

⁹³ *Margaret Louisa Home of the Young Women's Christian Association of the City of New York: 14 & 16 East Sixteenth Street* (New York: Young Women's Christian Association, 1904), 22.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 24.

⁹⁵ "A Great Hotel for Women Only," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Apr 5, 1896.

the standard of that age – the tubs were of porcelain, the floors white tile and the facings of marble; all the plumbing throughout the house was open and gave a sanitary impression (Figure 2.17, 2.18).⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Young Men’s Christian Association buildings across the United States represented the other half of the nineteenth-century middle-class moral geography of separate sphere. The Y.M.C.A. was conceived as a homosocial world, in which Anglo-Saxon Protestant men could cultivate an “upright, principled masculinity” through contact with other men, rather than with women.⁹⁷ For instance, the Y.M.C.A. Central Branch in Brooklyn (built in 1915), was equipped with both parlors and gyms, attempting to navigate manhood between the sporting life and evangelical culture (Figure 2.19). Compared to the Margaret Louisa Home, its interior was rather stoic since there was less fabric decoration (Figure 2.20). On the other hand, while billiards and chess tables were stereotypical in men’s residences, they were never found in women’s (Figure 2.21). Moreover, gender segregation was less strict in men’s residences because women were hired for housekeeping (Figure 2.22).

The 1910 and 1920 United States Census only documented the female staff of the Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home. The Home’s superintendent and other executives were native-born, while housekeepers and waitresses tended to be immigrants.

⁹⁶ Susan Sunshine, “Woman and Home: A Hotel for Women,” *Los Angeles Sunshine*, Dec 11, 1892.

⁹⁷ Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (University of Minnesota, 2009): xvii.



Figure 2.12: The Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home at 14 East 16th Street. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.13: Parlors of the Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home. Seymour B. Durst Old York Library Collection.
Columbia University.



Figure 2.14: The reception room of the Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Room. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.15: A single bedroom in Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.16: A triple bedroom in the Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.17: The pantry of Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.18: The laundry room of Y.W.C.A. Margaret Louisa Home. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.19: The pool room in the Y.M.C.A. Naval Branch in Brooklyn. 1908. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.20: Y.M.C.A. Central Branch, Brooklyn. General interior of lobby. ca. 1915. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.21: Y.M.C.A. Central Branch, Brooklyn. Large recreation room. ca. 1915. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.22: Waitresses in the Y.M.C.A. Central Branch in Brooklyn, early twentieth century. Springfield College Archives and Special Collections.

2.2.2 Homes for Immigrant Girls

In the workforce, another group of women were the immigrants, who were not familiar with the American urban customs. Many practiced Catholic or Jewish traditions that were unfit in a largely Protestant country. Few had adequate possessions when they reached the United States. According to a 1915 report conducted by the Y.W.C.A., in New York City, almost every European nation had a Home for its immigrant girls.⁹⁸

Jeanne d'Arc Residence

The Young Women's Home Society of the French Evangelical Church was the outcome of a protective movement started by a few young girls in 1888, who rented rooms in the neighborhood of their church, at 128 West 16th Street. The intent was to shelter and board women temporarily out of employment and to give a home to French-speaking young women from Europe.⁹⁹ The society was incorporated in 1890; in the same year a four-story house at 341 West 30th Street was purchased.¹⁰⁰ The Jeanne d'Arc Residence was another option for fresh-off-boat French girls, many of whom heard from older sisters or cousins of the wonderful wages received by French maids in this country.¹⁰¹ The institution was founded and incorporated in 1896 by Reverend Theophile Wucher as a temporary home for French girls who were separated from their families. In 1897 it was decided to place the home under the direction of a religious community, and in 1898 the Congregation of Divine Providence accepted stewardship of this ministry to women.¹⁰² The first building of the Jeanne d'Arc Residence, at 251 West 24th Street,

⁹⁸ Esther Packard, *A Study of Living Conditions of Self-Supporting Women in New York City* (New York: Metropolitan Board of the Young Women's Christian Association, 1915), 18.

⁹⁹ "Home for Young Frenchwomen," *New York Tribune*, Feb 7, 1897.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ "Opens Jeanne D'Arc Home," *New York Tribune*, Feb 23, 1912.

¹⁰² "History," Jeanne d'Arc Residence, accessed Feb 20, 2019, <http://jdaresidence.com/>.

was founded by Miss Catharine T. Smith in memory of her mother, a French woman. The plan was to accommodate twenty-five girls at one time, and the home encouraged voluntary donations.¹⁰³ In 1911, a beautiful and spacious house was built at 253 West 24th Street, to receive many more boarders (Figure 2.23). The only inviolable rule was that every girl must be at home at ten o'clock; as for going to the theatre, according to the Mother, "Most of our girls, however, being newly arrived from France, do not care to go. They cannot understand the language and they have little money. Besides, they have enough to entertain them here, helping each other to learn English, doing their sewing in the recreation room and telling stories of the fatherland, to which they are all very loyal."¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the Swedish Epworth Home at 588 Lexington Avenue was a Christian home for Scandinavian women, providing board and rooms at moderate rates.¹⁰⁵

Based on the 1920 United States Census, the Jeanne d'Arc at 253 West 24th Street, was operated by a group of nuns. Its directress Marie L. Mathias was from France. She had nine assistants: Mary Berg, Marie Comment, Augustine Petitjean and Rosalie Gerber from France; Dorothy Nowinski, Theophilla Justa and Rosalie Pior from Poland; Barbara Bittel from Germany; and Joanna Tobin from Ireland. Both the 1920 and 1930 censuses reflect that, although the Jeanne d'Arc was initially built for immigrant girls, a lot of its residents were older than forty. Some of those older women were widowed and had to support themselves. Residents of Jeanne d'Arc were a blend of native born and immigrant women. The immigrant women mainly came from French speaking countries like France, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada. The rest of them came from Catholic countries such as Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Puerto Rico. Most of

¹⁰³ "Jeanne D'Arc Home Opened," *New York Tribune*, Apr 10, 1896.

¹⁰⁴ "Opens Jeanne D'Arc Home," *New York Tribune*, Feb 23, 1912.

¹⁰⁵ Community Council of Greater New York, *Directory of Social and Health Agencies of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), 406.

the women who lived in the home were engaged in low-wage occupations. A large portion of those women were in the service industry and worked as maids, waitresses and cooks; some were dressmakers and milliners. A few of the residents were better paid as they worked as teachers, saleswomen, secretaries, nurses or stenographers.



Figure 2.23: Jeanne D'Arc Home at 253 West 24th Street, ca. 1912. Museum of the City of New York.

Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls

The non-sectarian Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls represented one of the philanthropic efforts of the Baroness Clara de Hirsch, who intended to aid Jewish immigrants, primarily of Russian origin, in the United States. In the 1880s and 1890s, the persecution of Jews in Russia gave rise to a “restless, resistless and disorganized flow” of Jewish immigrants to the United States. Clara’s husband Maurice de Hirsch, a German Jewish financier and philanthropist, established the Baron de Hirsch Fund in 1891, and the Fund’s major goal was to assist the immigrants in absorbing the American mode of life. To facilitate the immigrants’ transition to a new industrial environment, the Baron de Hirsch Fund conceived a variety of programs: shelter, the teaching of English, training in trades, providing artisans with tools necessary for them to get employed, and transportation to the interior of the United States where work could be found.¹⁰⁶

From 1897 to early 1899, the de Hirsch Home operated out of temporary quarters at 208 Second Avenue with boarding accommodations for up to thirteen young women. Initially the Home only offered domestic service training, but in 1898 industrial courses in dressmaking and millinery were also available. Shortly after the death of the Baroness de Hirsch in April 1899, a new building was completed at 225 East 63rd Street where the agency formally organized its residence and trade school (Figure 2.24). Wage earners who did not earn over six dollars a week could board at the Home and have all of its privileges for three dollars a week.¹⁰⁷ Since many of the resident pupils were immigrant girls or those who hadn’t had the advantages of attending public school, one hour daily was devoted to English; geography, history and arithmetic were

¹⁰⁶ Samuel K. Joseph, *History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund: The Americanization of the Jewish Immigrant* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1935), 15, 253.

¹⁰⁷ “The Clara de Hirsch Home,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1899.

taught as well.¹⁰⁸ One descendent of a former resident commented online: “Mom had a tremendous sense of gratitude toward the home as for her it was an island of stability where she was introduced to broader horizons.”

The architects, Brunner & Tryon, planned a five-story building to cover the entire frontage of the property, 125 feet wide, with three wings extending to a depth of eighty feet, and the whole structure resembled in plan the letter E. The building was capable of hosting seventy-five to one hundred girls. On the first floor were a large dining room, reception room, and the administration offices. The kitchen and the laundry were ample for the service of the residents and also afforded facilities for the teaching of cooking and laundry work. On the second floor were a library, a parlor, and the superintendent’s rooms. Girls’ bedrooms and bathrooms were on the upper floors, and they also had a roof garden. Separated from the roof garden was an infirmary, which could only be reached by the elevator from the first floor, so as to keep the sick isolated from other inmates.

¹⁰⁸ *Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls* (New York: Press of the Keystone Printer, 1905), 7.



Figure 2.24: Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls. East 63rd Street. 1900. Museum of the City of New York.

Young Women's Hebrew Association Building

The headquarter of the Young Women's Hebrew Association, at 31 West 110th street, opposite Central Park, was also built to meet the housing problem of unchaperoned Jewish girls in New York City. At the turn of twentieth century, south-central Harlem was the area of town where the majority of well-to-do Jewish families resettled after quitting the Lower East Side. In 1907, *McClure's* magazine noted that "East Side Jews," meaning those who had immigrated from

Eastern Europe and largely settled on the Lower East Side, had built up a community of 75,000 in Harlem, which extended from the northern boundary of Central Park, at 110th street, and continuing northwest to the Harlem river.¹⁰⁹ There were notorious dancing academies, where unsuspecting young women found themselves ultimately entrapped by pimps; locations of these schools were no secret, for they ran advertisements in Yiddish presses.¹¹⁰ Some naïve girls were enticed with promises of marriage and ended up in brothels.¹¹¹ On the other hand, based on a Y.W.H.A.'s survey on all the associations and institutions that made a specialty of boarding young women, it was discovered that places like the Y.W.C.A and St. Bartholomew's were only giving places to Protestant girls.¹¹² As a result, when the Y.W.H.A. opened its door in 1903 in Harlem, at Lexington Avenue and 101st Street, residential accommodations were provided to girls who wanted to live in the surroundings of their faith; so popular did this house become that within a short time there was a demand for larger quarters.¹¹³ In 1914, the Y.W.H.A. moved to its new home north of Central Park (Figure 2.25, 2.26). There were about one hundred rooms in the house, many of which offered "views of city rooftops, green trees, glistening lake and autumn sky."¹¹⁴ Commercial courses and domestic services were taught within the house, as well as Hebrew, Bible Study, Jewish History, English, French, German, dancing and gymnastics.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Jews of Harlem: The Rise, Decline, and Revival of a Jewish Community* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 47.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Jews of Harlem: The Rise, Decline, and Revival of a Jewish Community* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 136.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² "Housing of Jewish Girls," *New York Times*, May 11, 1919.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Marion Weinstein, "Of Interest to Women," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger*, Sep 18, 1914.

¹¹⁵ "Housing of Jewish Girls," *New York Times*, May 11, 1919.



Figure 2.25: 1916. Sunday dinner at 31 West 110th Street. Residential accommodations were provided for over 150 young women at the Y.W.H.A. building. Young Women's Hebrew Association Records.



Figure 2.26: 1918. Flag raising in front of the Y.W.H.A. building, during the First World War.

2.2.3 Commercial Hotels

Non-profit residences run by charitable institutions and religious groups mainly served working-class and immigrant girls and had long waiting lists. For young women who had just started their careers in New York City, apartments were expensive and hard to find since landlords preferred male tenants. In 1891, “An Apartment-House for Women” was published in *Architecture and Building*. It estimated that around 100,000 women were seeking independence in New York; a large number of them were cultured and educated, whose “refined tastes instill in them that love of home and domesticity to which life in a boarding-house is distinctly apart.” Those women asserted that they would not subject themselves to restrictions that were unnecessary to the proper management of an apartment house, and they requested the same “free regulations” as were laid down for men. According to the author, women were “universally” the better tenants because they were always “conscientious about their rent”, “less critical” and “exacting in their demands.”¹¹⁶

Martha Washington Hotel

Situated on East 29th Street, in the Madison Square area of New York City, the Martha Washington Hotel was the first hotel for professional women in the city (Figure 2.27, 2.28). Its developer, the Women’s Hotel Company, was incorporated in 1900 specifically to create such facilities.¹¹⁷ The company’s advisory committee assured that the house mother would not restrict the residents in any way but would always be accessible in case of illness or the need for advice or sympathy.¹¹⁸ Although it was exclusively a woman’s hotel, men as visitors were

¹¹⁶ Janet C. Lewis, “An Apartment-House for Women,” *Architecture and Building* 14 no.20 (May 1891): 236-237.

¹¹⁷ *Martha Washington Hotel* (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2012), 1.

¹¹⁸ “Woman’s Realm: Not a Home of Charity,” *New York Times*, Sep 4, 1898.

admitted to the main corridor and reception rooms on the second floor (Figure 2.29).¹¹⁹ The twelve-story structure contained four hundred and fifty rooms, single and *en suite*. The cost of living at the hotel ranged from \$1.50 per day for a single room, without meals, to \$2.50 - 3.50 per day and upward for a suite.¹²⁰ The parlors, music rooms and tea rooms were all furnished in a way that catered to the taste of middle-class women. There were a number of paintings and sculptures loaned for exhibition purposes by Helen M. Gould, one of the hotel's stockholders.¹²¹ The hotel's well-lit library was designed in way that faithfully resembled furnishings in Washington's home at Mount Vernon, Virginia (Figure 2.30).¹²² The restaurant was accessible to the public, and was festively decorated with table linens and palm trees (Figure 2.31).

The 1910 United States Census shows that the hotel's manager was a man Arthur M. Eager who lived in the building with his wife and daughter. The rest of the hotel's employees were all female, including a checker, a store room helper, two seamstresses, nineteen housekeepers, and so on (Figure 3.32). Except for one housekeeper was from New York, all the other female employees were European immigrants. The 1920 and 1930 records reflect the same pattern, a hotel was operated by a male manager with female assistants. All the 1910, 1920 and 1930 censuses show that guests at the Martha Washington Hotel mainly engage in middle-class occupations, ranging from sculptor, vocalist, dancer, actress to nurse, teacher, accountant, editor, and lawyer. Most guests came from New York and other American states. In the 1910 census, a few foreign-born guests included Janie Levaes, an insurance broker from England, Caroline Emanuel, a public school teacher from Scotland and Mary Lanford, a secretary from

¹¹⁹ *Hotel Martha Washington: 29th Street near Madison Ave, New York* (New York: Martha Washington Hotel, 1903).

¹²⁰ William Goodrich Bowdoin, "The Hotel Martha Washington: An Interesting Experiment in Inn Keeping," *Independent ... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 55 (Jun 1903), 1491.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

Canada. In 1920, foreign guests included M. D. Roseman, a nurse from Russia, Katherine Esther Lott, a secretary from New Zealand, Elizabeth Burky, a private teacher from Switzerland, and Mary Andrews from Argentina. In 1930, foreign-born guests included Rose Strull, a saleswoman from Romania, Lucile Gillet, a translator from France, Aina Munch, a child nurse from Finland, Margaret Longstreet, a furrier from Germany, and Maria Valdes from Cuba.



Figure 2.27: Hotel Martha Washington, East 29th Street between Lexington Avenue and Park Avenue. New York Historical Society.



Figure 2.28: "Arriving - Martha Washington Hotel," ca. 1915 - 1920. Library of Congress.

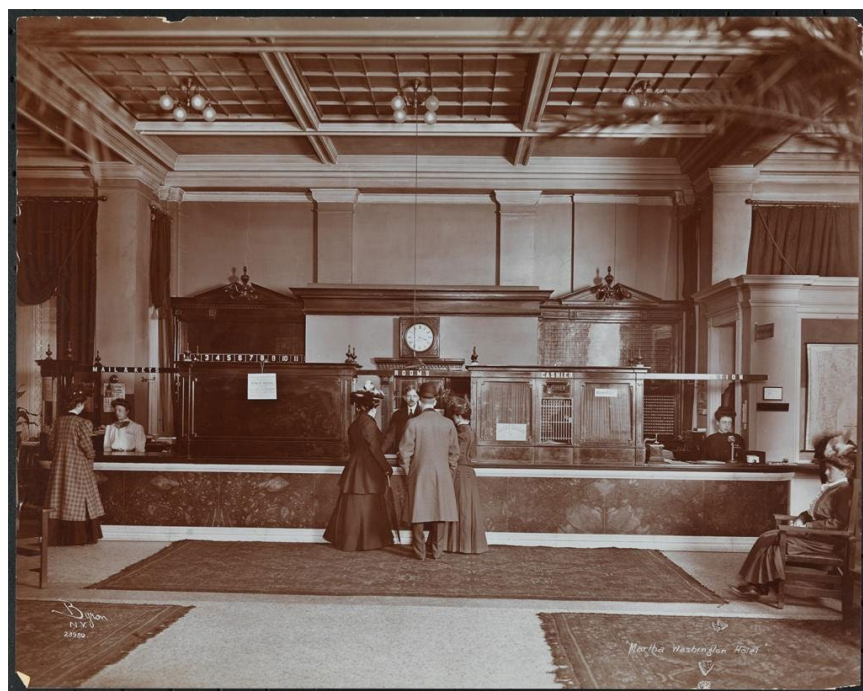


Figure 2.29: Lobby of Martha Washington Hotel. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.30: Library of Martha Washington Hotel. 1907. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.31: Dining Room of Martha Washington Hotel. 1912. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.32: "Elevator girl, Martha Washington Hotel," ca. 1915 - 1920. Library of Congress.

Trowmart Inn

Opened in 1906, the Trowmart Inn was located at 607 Hudson Street and adjacent to Abingdon Square, one of the few parks in Greenwich Village (Figure 2.33). The location was conveniently sited near big shops, offices and factories. Compared to various women's hotels and semi-charitable institutions, where a permit from the proprietor was needed to stay out later than ten o'clock, the Trowmart Inn had fewer restrictions on women's activities. As advertised in its circular, "The corner-stone of this success is the free latch-key to every girl."¹²³ This six-story hotel was built by a rich New York merchant William R. H. Martin as a memorial to his son Trowbridge, and then turned over to a group of women who ran a hotel for self-supporting women under thirty-five years old.¹²⁴ \$4.50 a week would cover room, breakfast and dinner if two girls shared one bedroom; if she lived by herself, five dollars would be charged. Each floor had forty-three bedrooms, five bathtubs and ten washbasins. Every bedroom was a light room, either facing the street or the courtyard (Figure 2.34, 2.35). Moreover, Trowmart Inn provided healthcare to its guests by having a resident woman physician, charging much less than ordinary rates.¹²⁵

¹²³ "Notes," *The Craftsman* (Nov 1906) 11: 254.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Trowmart Inn: Exclusively for Women* (New York: Cheltenham Press, 1906),



Figure 2.33: Trowmart Inn for Working Girls, at Hudson and West 12th Streets, 1906. Museum of the City of New York.

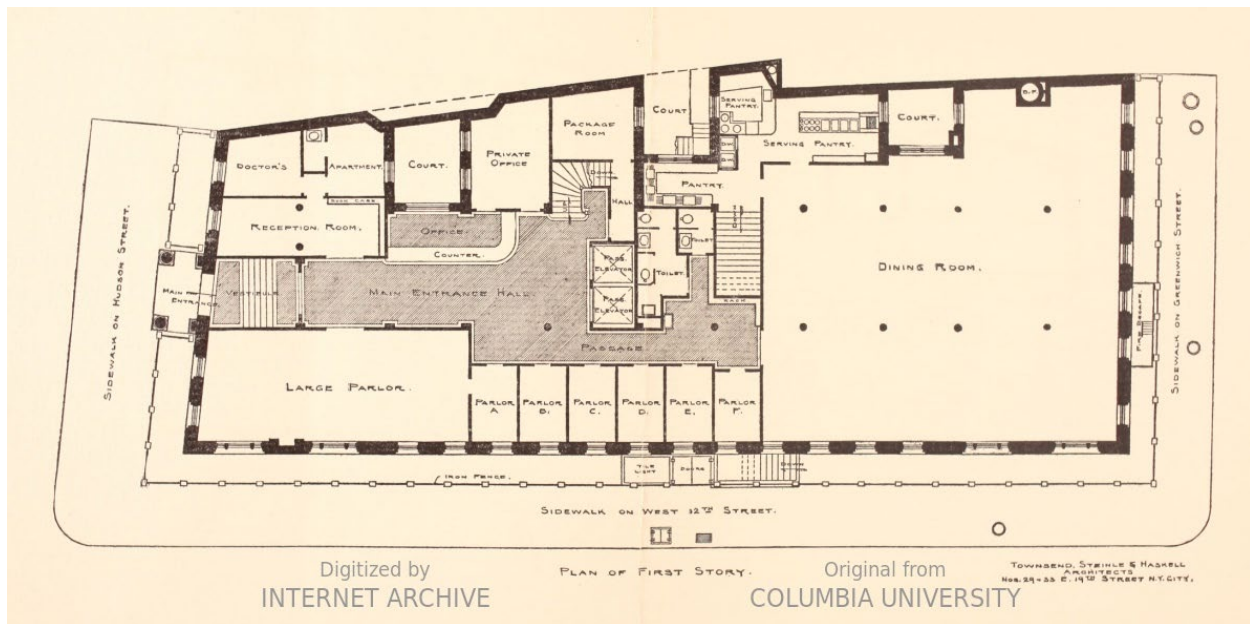


Figure 2.34: Plan of first floor, 1906. *Trowmart Inn: Exclusively for Women* (New York: Cheltenham Press, 1906).

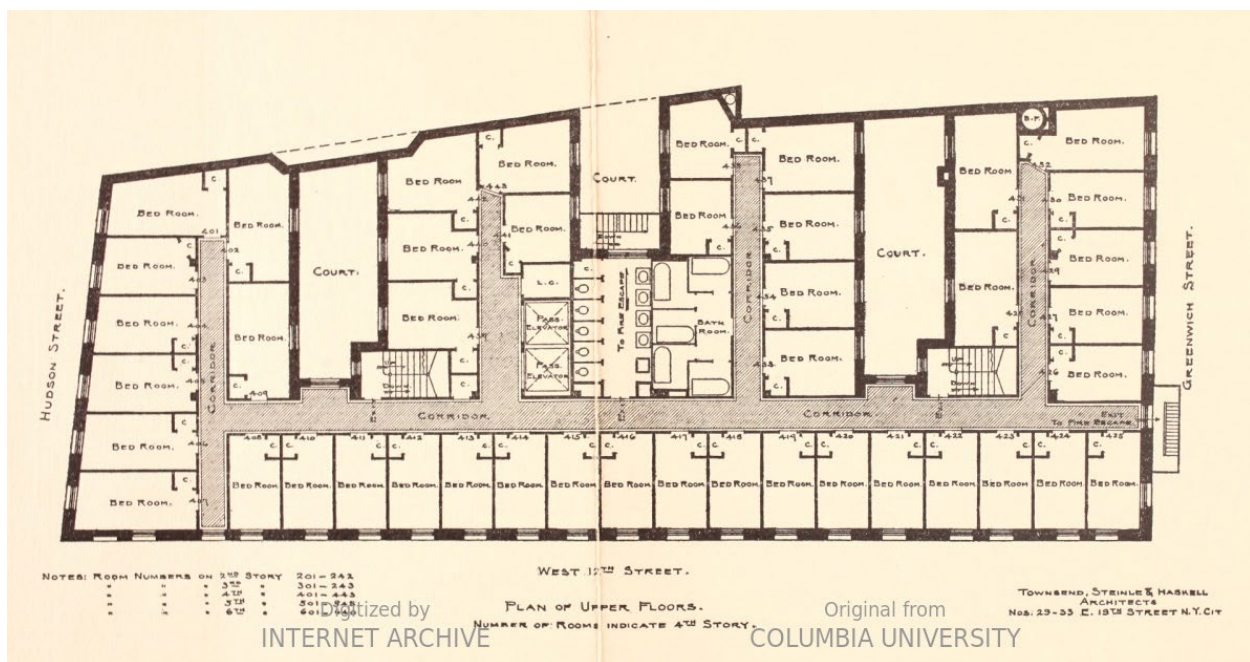


Figure 2.35: Plan of upper floors, 1906. *Trowmart Inn: Exclusively for Women* (New York: Cheltenham Press, 1906).

Allerton House for Women

Designed by Arthur Loomis Harmon and Murgatroyd & Ogden, the seventeen-story Allerton House for Women opened at 130 East 57th Street in 1923 (Figure 2.36). The Allerton chain of single-sex hotels started its business in New York City with a modest structure of fifty rooms in Greenwich Village (1912-1913). The second Allerton House was developed in 1915 and was soon purchased by the Y.W.C.A. and adapted into a women's residence. The next four Allerton Houses all catered to a male clientele, located predominantly in East Midtown, 143 East 39th Street (1916-1918), 45 East 55th Street (1919), 128-130 East 57th Street (1921-1923), and the Fraternities Club at 14-22 East 38th Street (1922-1924).¹²⁶ From an economic standpoint, the Allerton Houses ensured a low rental cost and certain personal freedom to young men and women. On the other hand, sociologically, the architects wanted to form an intimate community with *esprit de corps* in each house, which would allow young men and women from smaller cities, towns and the country, to network and become acclimated into New York City life. In designing the interior and layout of the men's house in 39th Street (Figure 2.37, 2.38), the architect Arthur Loomis Harmon endeavored to create an atmosphere more "akin to that of the private club."¹²⁷ An attractive feature of the men's house was the roof garden, which was enclosed by arcade columns forming a crown on the building.

In developing the idea of the Allerton House for Women, it was clearly stated that the new hotel was to shelter women who "think and work independently," rather than babysit young girls. Therefore, residents were not supervised and they were not regulated regarding evening hours;

¹²⁶ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *The Allerton 39th Street House Designation* (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2008), 4.

¹²⁷ Arthur Loomis Harmon, "Allerton House," *The American Architect* 115 (Jun 4, 1919): 773.

each guest, once admitted, “will be her own mistress.”¹²⁸ Regarding the plan of the Allerton House for Women, the architect confessed that it was “superficially” about the same as the men’s house’s (Figure 2.39, 2.40). But on the bedroom floor, women’s closets were larger and bathtubs were used rather than showers.¹²⁹ In the belief that “women want to feel at home where they live” and “men are apt to feel at home somewhere else,” the public space in the women’s house was about twice that in the houses for men, which became their chief difference.¹³⁰

In the first floor, there was a central lobby, an office, a reception room and a large restaurant on the Lexington Avenue side. A beautiful staircase led from the hall to the lounges in which visitors of either sex could be entertained (Figure 2.41, 2.42). The next floor, with the cafeteria and dining-rooms, was likewise open to the public, but this was the upper limit for the male and “feminism prevails above.”¹³¹ The typical bedroom floor plan provided thirty-four outside rooms; twelve connected with either bathrooms or showers and there were lavatories in all other rooms. Two groups of common toilets and bathrooms were provided.¹³² The roof provided a roof garden, a solarium, a large room for dances or meetings, with pantry facilities and music rooms (Figure 2.43).

¹²⁸ “A Business Women’s Hotel,” *New York Times*, Feb 1, 1920.

¹²⁹ Arthur Loomis Harmon, “The Allerton Houses,” *Architecture* 47 (Feb 1923): 41-45.

¹³⁰ “The Allerton House for Women,” *Architecture and Building* 55 (March 1923): 25.

¹³¹ “Allerton House, a Club for New York Business Women,” *The Manchester Guardian*, Feb 12, 1924.

¹³² *Ibid.*



Figure 2.36: Allerton House for Women. 130 East 57th Street. 1923. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.37: Allerton House for Men. 143 East 39th Street. 1919. Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 2.38: Lounge of the Allerton House for Men. 1919. 143 East 39th Street. Museum of the City of New York.

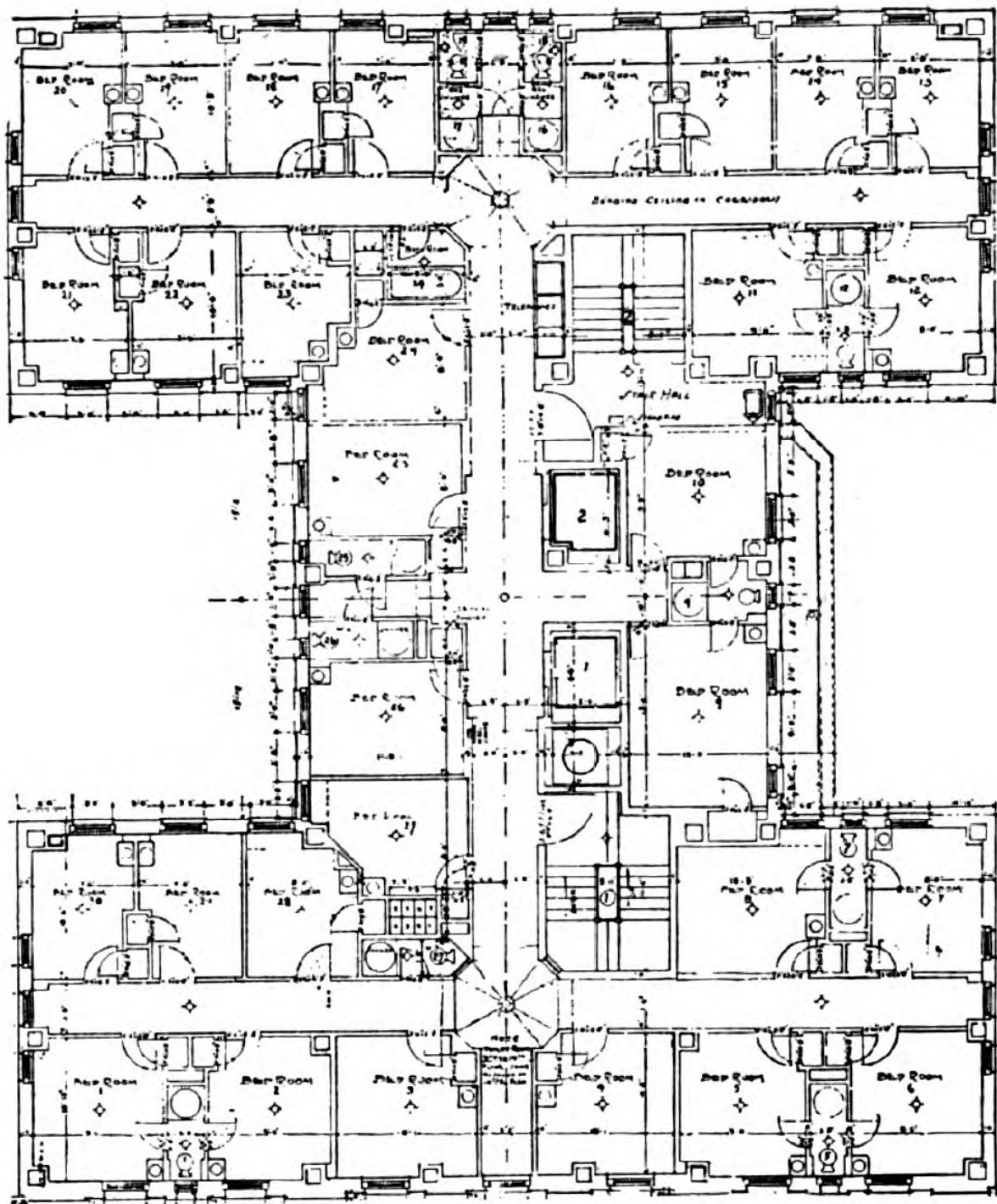


Figure 2.39: Typical floor plan of Allerton House for Men. *Architecture* 47 (Feb 1923): 43.

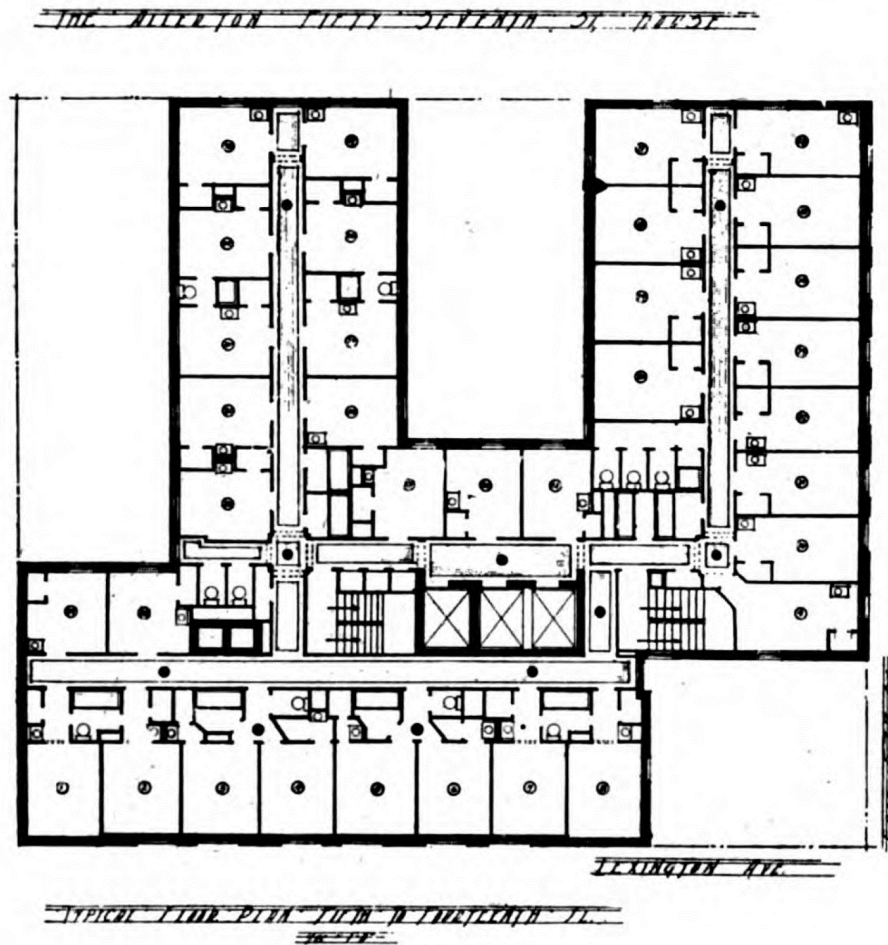


Figure 2.40: Typical Floor Plan of the Allerton House for Women. *Architecture* 47 (Feb 1923): 42.



Figure 2.41: The spacious lobby with graceful circular stairway leading to the mezzanine.



Figure 2.42: Lounge on the mezzanine and reception rooms.



Figure 2.43: Roof terrace and solarium of the Allerton House for Women.

Parkside Hotel

Like the Allerton Hotel for Women, the sixteen-story Parkside Hotel was also designed by architects Murgatroyd & Ogden. It was designed in neo-Classical style to blend with the old residences surrounding Gramercy Park (Figure 2.44). Its interior was finished with simple and inexpensive materials, having plaster painted walls with wood trim and terrazzo floors (Figure 2.45). Its color scheme was harmonious throughout, being cream, gray and white, with floors in black and white. The lighting system was also specially designed to add to this soothing effect. Light buff colored walls, Colonial-style maple furniture, as well as draperies and rugs, created homelike bedrooms.¹³³ Opened in 1927, there were around 320 guest rooms in the Parkside Hotel, all single; some had private and others semi-private baths. Every bedroom was an outside room facing the street, because the hotel was a corner structure that extended along Irving Place to 19th Street (Figure 2.46, 2.47). For the convenience of the guests, there were

¹³³ "Eighteen Gramercy Park, A New York Residential Hotel for Women," *Architectural Forum* 52 (Feb 1930): 259.

reception rooms, parlors, a shopping service room, and a main dining room on the first floor; guests could entertain themselves in the top-floor solarium and lounge.¹³⁴



Figure 2.44: Parkside Hotel. 18 Gramercy Park, 1928. Museum of the City of New York.

¹³⁴ Ibid.



Figure 2.45: Dining room hostess of Parkside Hotel. 18 Gramercy Park. 1931. Museum of the City of New York.

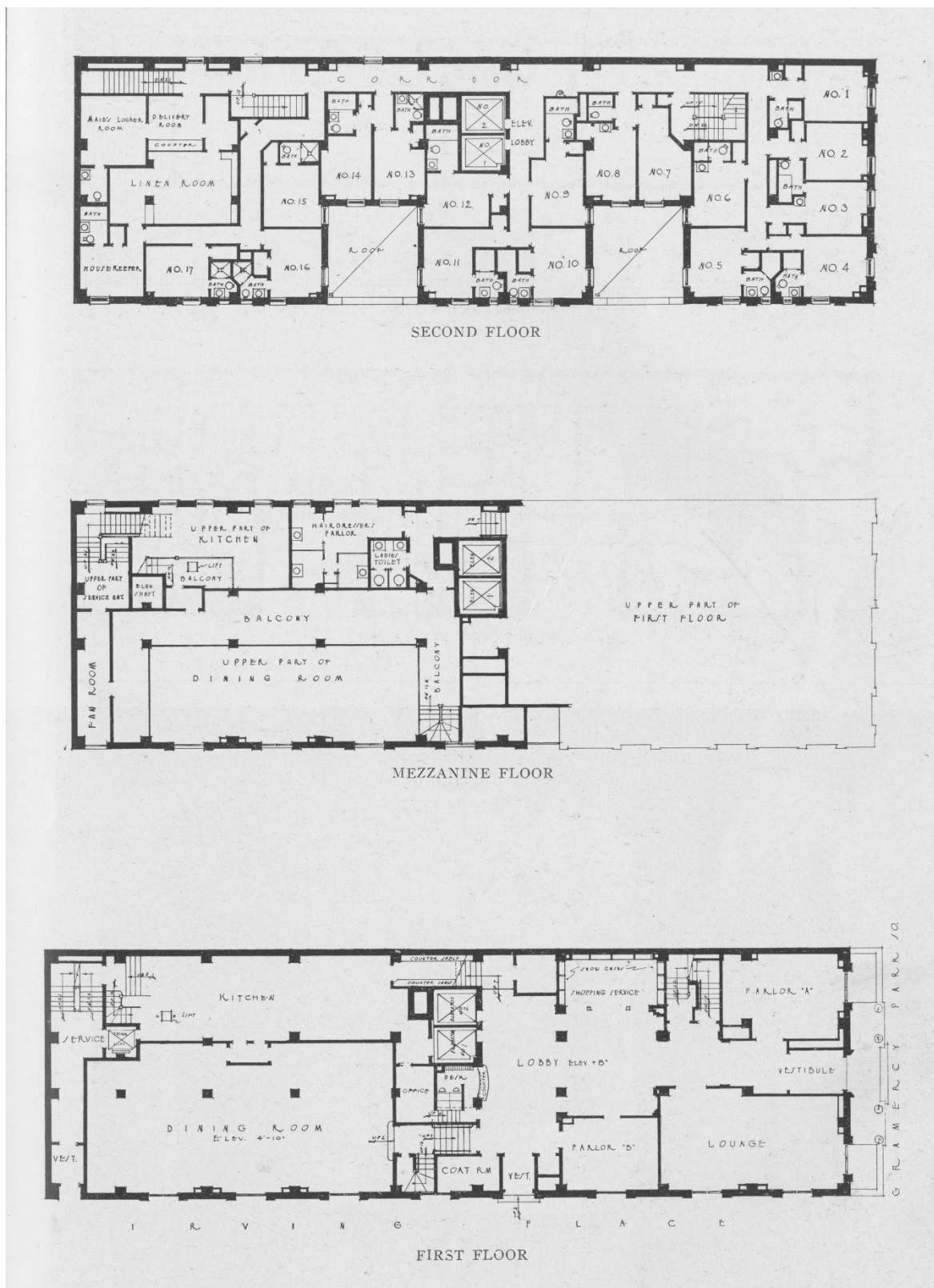


Figure 2.46: Floor plans of Parkside Hotel, 18 Gramercy Park. *Architectural Forum* 52 (Feb 1930): 263.

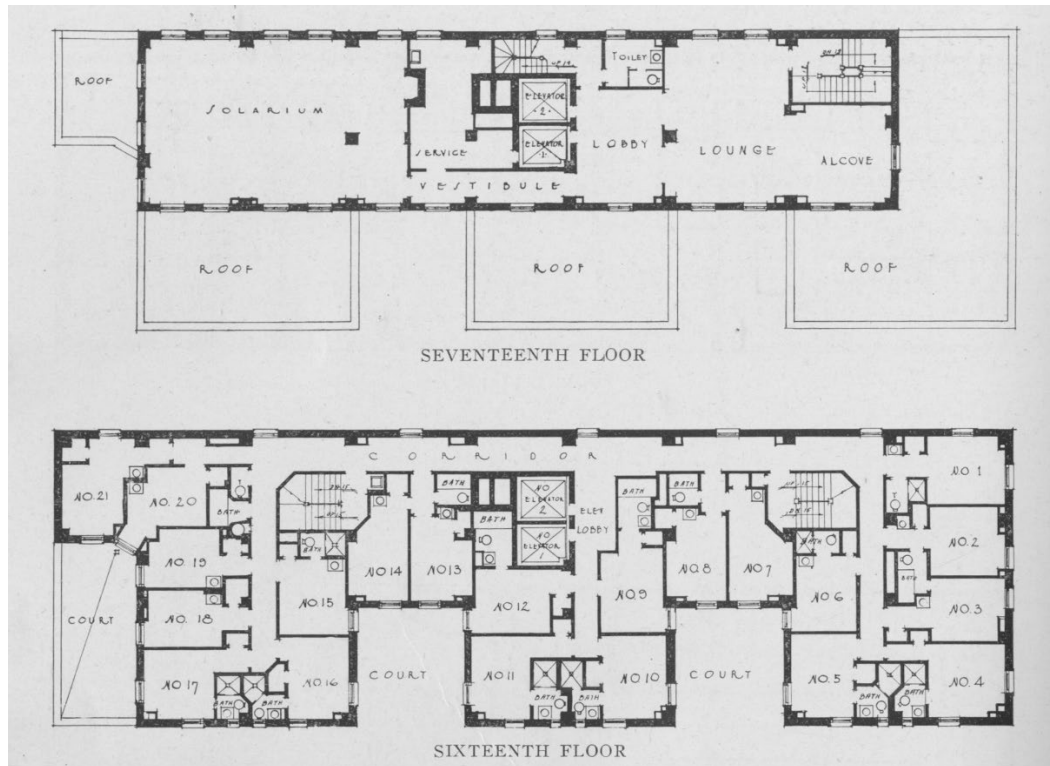


Figure 2.47: Floor plans of the Parkside Hotel. 18 Gramercy Park. *Architectural Forum* 52 (Feb 1930): 264.

Barbizon Hotel

Towering over East Midtown, the Barbizon Hotel was another masterpiece by hotel specialist Murgatroyd & Ogden (Figure 2.48). Built in the mid-1920s, the Barbizon was among the first women's hotels to reflect the provisions of the 1916 Zoning Resolution. Due to World War I and the following recession, few buildings were constructed in New York City immediately after the passage of the zoning ordinance.¹³⁵ The vigorous arrangement of setbacks and recessed courts created playful spaces and enhanced the variation of light and dark.¹³⁶ Detailed with an eclectic blend of Italian Romanesque, Gothic, and Moorish ornament, the Barbizon was credited for its

¹³⁵ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission *Barbizon Hotel for Women* (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2012), 5.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

high quality of design (Figure 2.49). Ranging from salmon to light red, the brickwork was laid up with richness and trimmed with a neutral-toned limestone.¹³⁷ The artful utilization of Gothic windows not only scaled well with the hotel's great masses and heights, but also gave a romantic feel to the facades.¹³⁸ As a club residence for business and professional women, and for students of art, drama and music, the hotel provided the same carefully supervised, communal life as at single-sex boarding schools or colleges – "House mothers reigned every floor. Only in the music room and lounge could a girl entertain a young man."¹³⁹ There was a library, a lounge for tea in the afternoon, a health club and swimming pool, and a roof garden for relaxation (Figure 2.50-2.53).

Based on the 1930 United States Census, most of Barbizon's guests were native born and very much likely to undertake artistic occupations. There lived Helen Ressler, a model from Ohio, Helen Bourns, a singer from Maryland, Rose Barr, an interior decorator from Iowa, Margaret Gallagher, a trained nurse from Pennsylvania, Florence Du Bois, a statistician from Kansas, and so on.

¹³⁷ Matlack Price, "The Barbizon," *Architectural Forum* 48 (May 1928): 677.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *Story of Barbizon* (New York: Golden Tulip Barbizon Hotel, 1983), 1.



Figure 2.48: View of the Barbizon from street level, 1927. Museum of the City of New York.

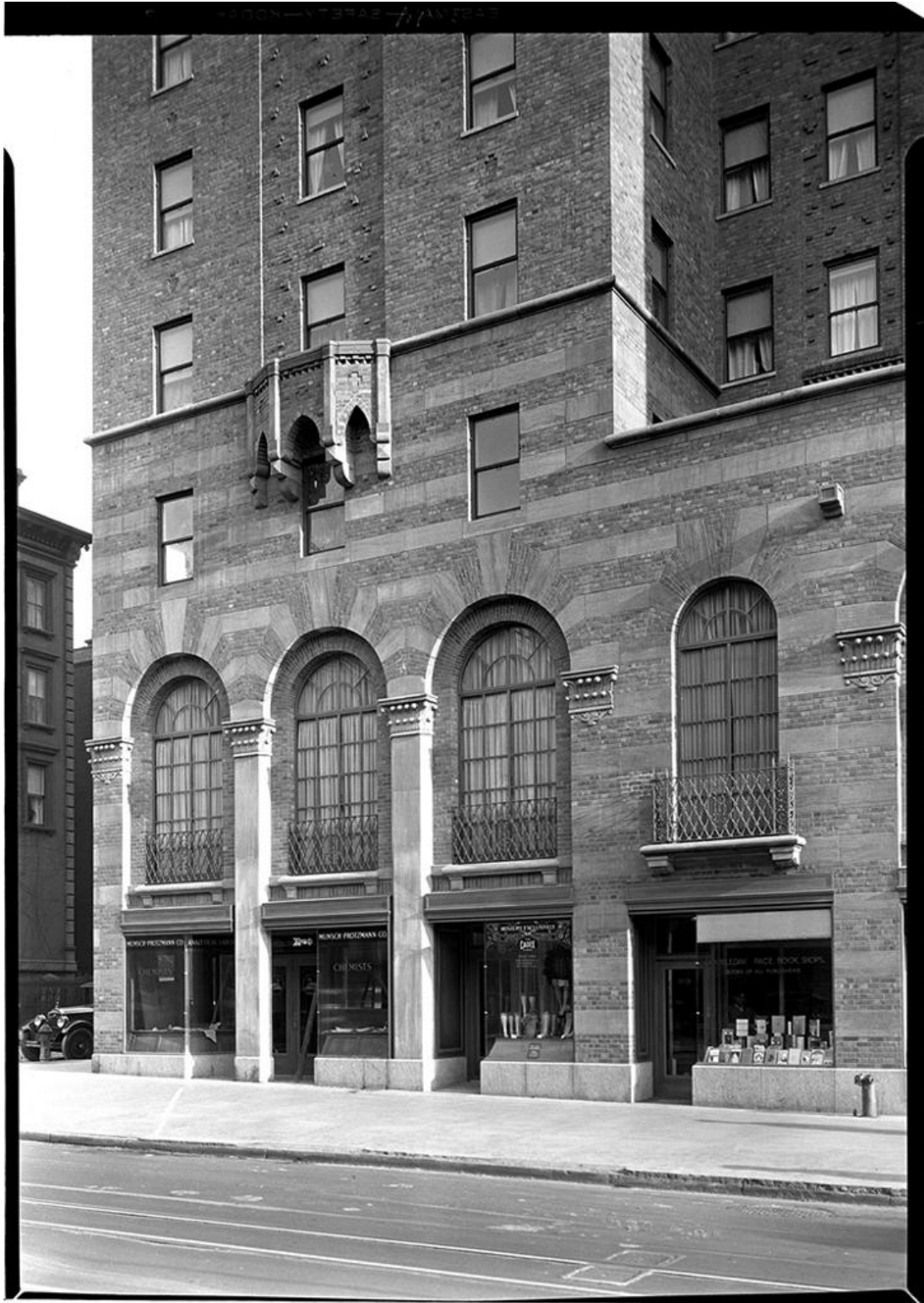


Figure 2.49: Lexington Avenue facade with three retail stores: a chemist's, a hosiery store and a Doubleday Pace bookshop, 1927. Museum of the City of New York.

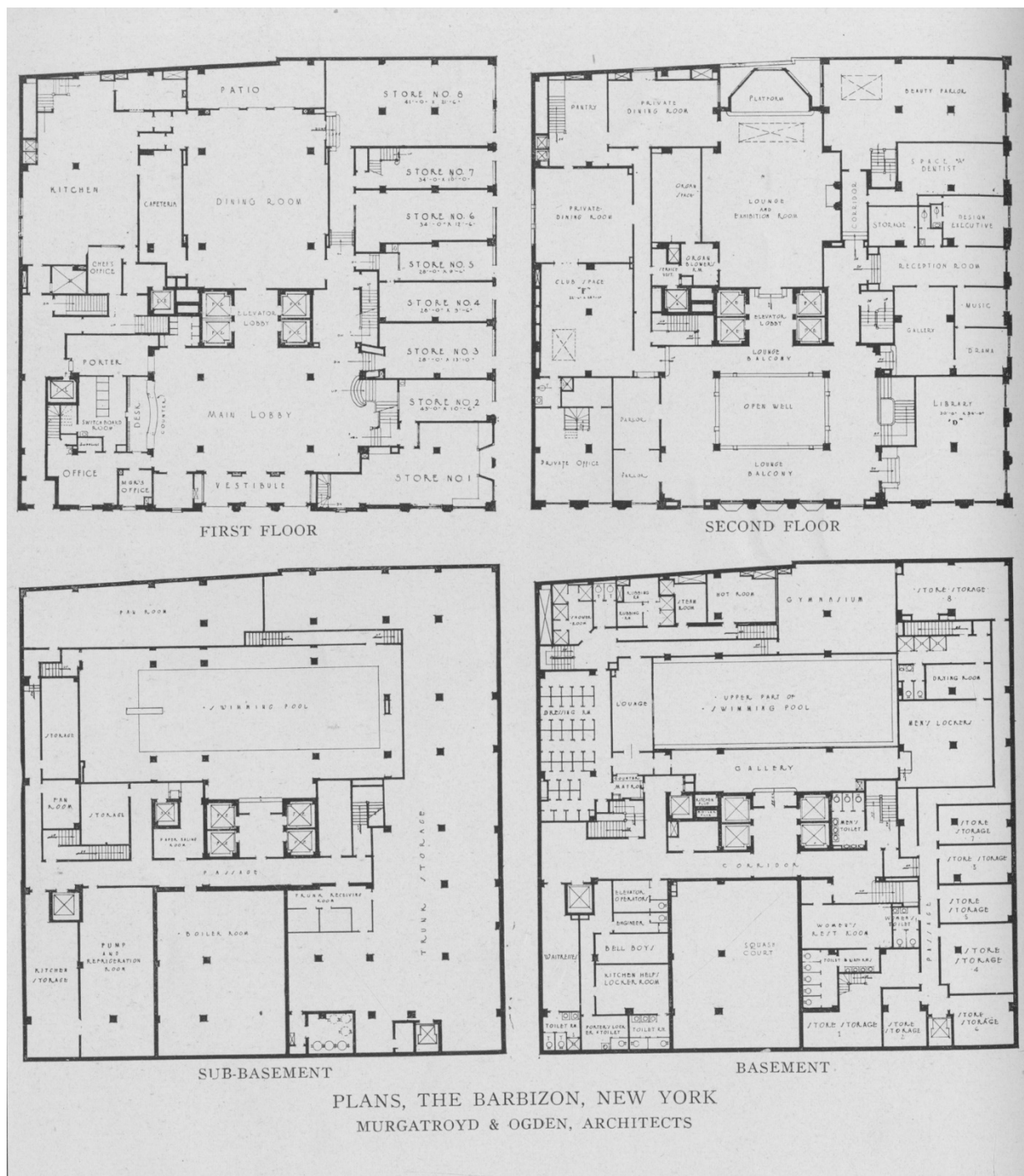


Figure 2.50: Floor plans of Barbizon Hotel. *Architectural Forum* 48 (May 1928): 682.



Figure 2.51: Vista of city through arches on the roof deck, 1927. Museum of the City of New York.

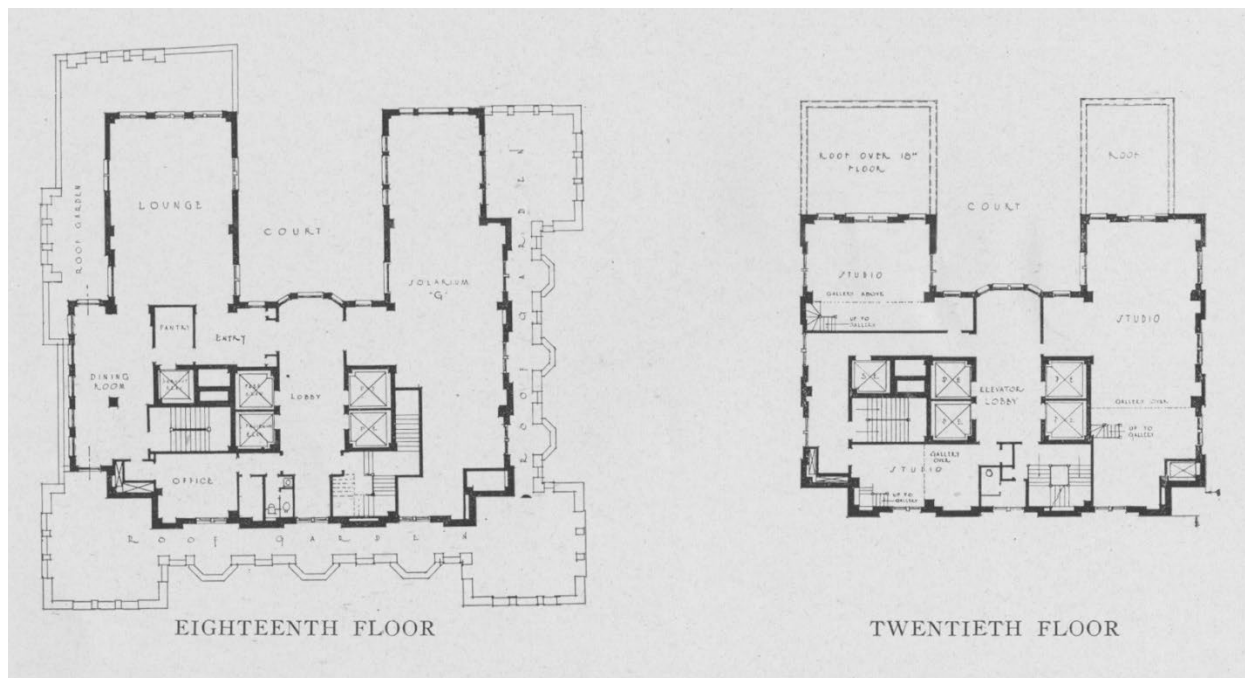
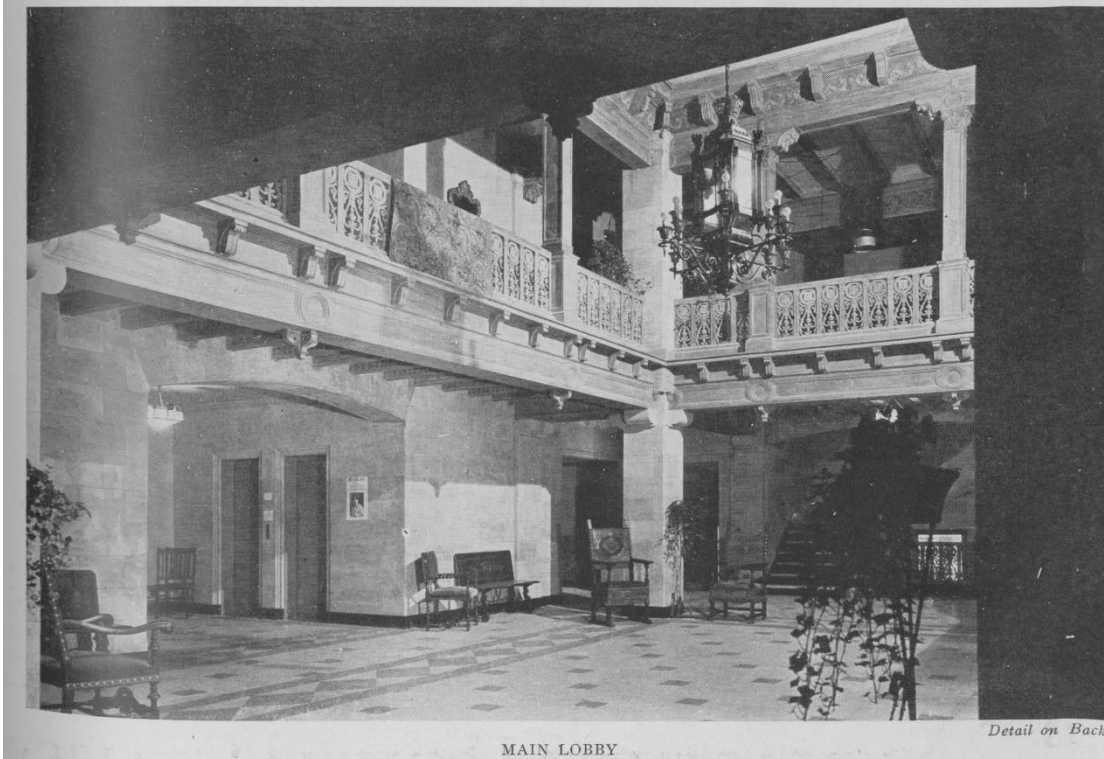


Figure 2.52: Floor plans of Barbizon Hotel, 1928. *Architectural Forum* 48 (May 1928): 684.



LOUNGE AND EXHIBITION ROOM



MAIN LOBBY

Detail on Back

Figure 2.53: Interior design of Barbizon Hotel. *Architectural Forum* 48 (May 1928): 691.

2.2.4 Clubhouses

The Twenties witnessed constructions of the most magnificent hotels for business and professional women, which created refined environment for entertainment, cultural nourishment, career development and political participation.

Panhellenic House

The Panhellenic House, one of the largest Art-Deco skyscrapers, was a monument to sisterhood (Figure 2.54-2.56). The Panhellenic Association of New York formed in 1920 when members of the National Panhellenic Congress, then constituted of sixteen sororities, made a move to unite more than 3,000 women in New York City.¹⁴⁰ Considering that each year hundreds of female graduates came to the city to continue their studies or work, the committee decided to build a club hotel to accommodate college sorority women with reasonable rates. The site at the corner of Mitchell Place and First Avenue, at 49th Street, was in the vicinity of the proposed Tudor City; it was selected for its convenience to business sections and the fact that it was assured sunlight on the east, south and west.¹⁴¹ In 1927, ground was broken for the house and the new building opened its door in the following year. The tower-style club hotel was designed by John Mead Howells, who was known for the neo-Gothic skyscraper Tribune Tower in Chicago.

On the first floor, the foyer was enclosed by gold-flecked walls. Three steps down, the Pompeian dining-room was furnished with patina-toned swinging lamp frames, and its red wall panels were separated by painted black pilasters (Figure 2.57). Upstairs, there was a two-story ballroom of five hundred seats, decorated in an arresting harmony of burnt orange, pale

¹⁴⁰ "New Panhellenic House," *New York Times*, May 20, 1928.

¹⁴¹ "120,000 Women Are Interested in New East Side Skyscraper," *New York Herald Tribune*, Nov 21, 1926.

green, silver and salmon (Figure 2.58, 2.59). Across the foyer, there was the “Tree of Life” reception room of brilliant red and deep brown, so called from the design of the linen wall panels done by Rodier of Paris, and the same pattern reappeared in the diaphanous window draperies (Figure 2.60). The Blade Room, similarly named after its Rodier panels, was of restful greens and grays and a touch of rose, and another reception room of burnt orange, silver and green. All were alluring yet simple and exquisitely artistic. A spacious roof garden sat on one corner of the fourth floor, and was adjacent to the club room for fraternity girls. The topmost crown of the tower was occupied by a rose and silver solarium and a surrounding balcony (Figure 2.61). The floors in between were given to 380 bedrooms, all cozily furnished; most bedrooms had private baths, and a few balconies generated by the setback style (Figure 2.62, 2.63).¹⁴²

Emily Eaton Hepburn, president of the board of directors, demonstrated a woman’s ability of handling big business deals through the fund-raising for the Panhellenic House. The financing of Panhellenic House was accomplished by arranging mortgages for one million dollars, and an issue of stock paying six percent interest. A common stock of two-hundred-thousand dollars, was apportioned to college women of fraternities associated in the project.¹⁴³ Upon the completion of Panhellenic House, Hepburn also ensured that the trustees who ran it would all be women. Mrs. Hepburn was born in Montpelier, Vermont and educated at St. Lawrence University, class of 1887. Besides her devotion to historic restoration and maintenance, which included the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace Museum and the home of George Washington’s ancestors in England, she also campaigned for civil service reform and women’s suffrage

¹⁴² Frances Drewry McMullen, “Panhellenic House: A Skyscraper, Up-to-Date Club Home for Young College Women,” *Woman’s Journal* 14 (Jan 1929): 20-21, 40.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

(Figure 2.64).¹⁴⁴ In 1924, she joined Anne Morgan to raise the clubhouse of the American Woman's Association, a high-rise hotel club at 353 West 57th Street.¹⁴⁵



Figure 2.54: The Panhellenic Tower under construction. ca. 1927-1928. Seymour B. Durst Old York Library Collection.
Columbia University.

¹⁴⁴ "Mrs. A. B. Hepburn, A Civic Leader, 90," *New York Times*, Aug 16, 1956.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Gray, "For Women Only; Wear Your Sorority Pin," *New York Times*, Dec 4, 2011.



Figure 2.55: Model of ornamental motif above entrance, reproduced in cast stone, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 788.

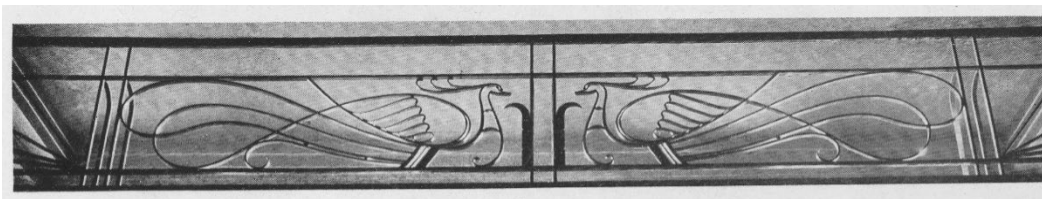


Figure 2.56: Ornamental detail, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 789.

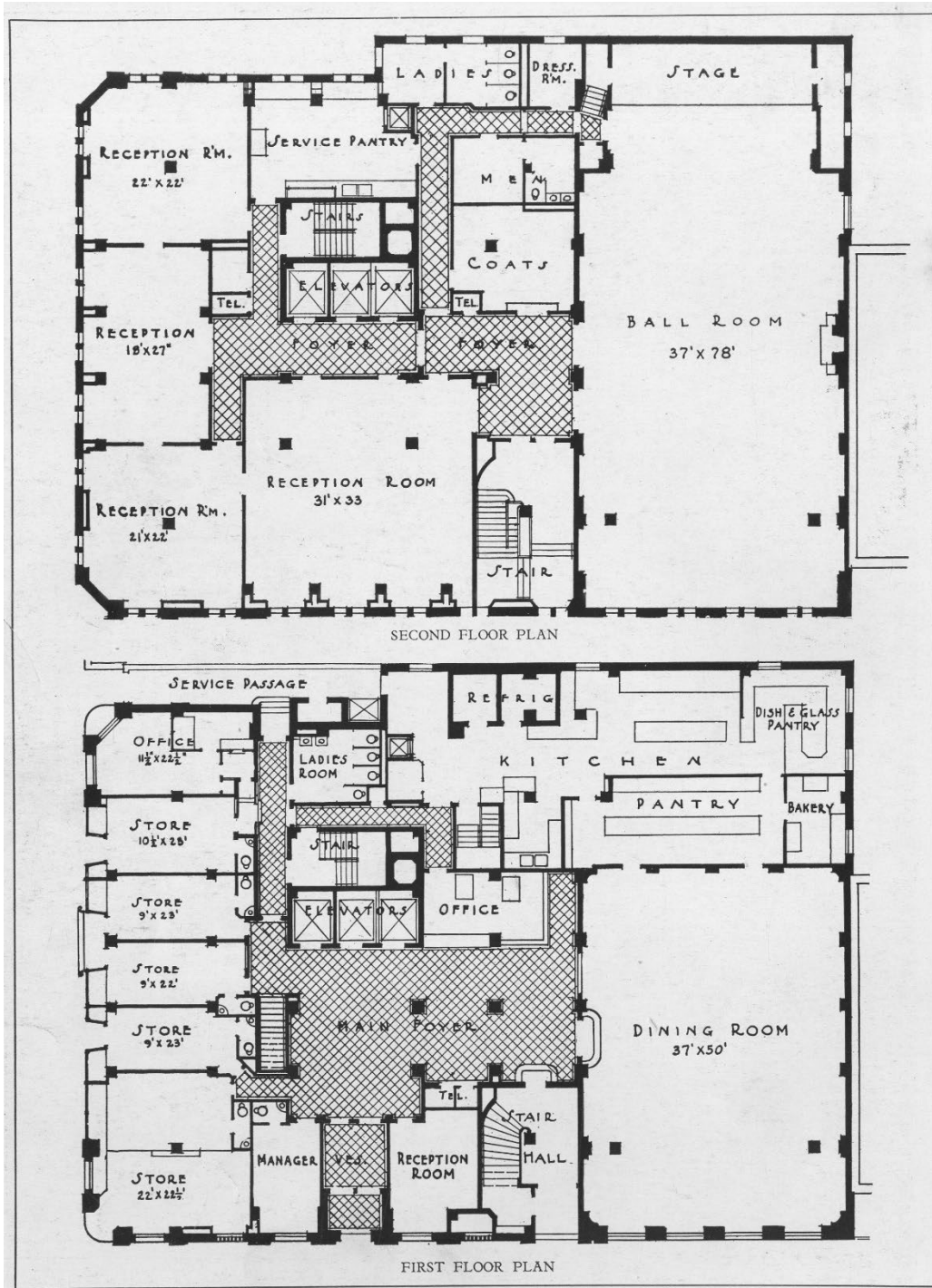


Figure 2.57: First and second floor plans, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 798.

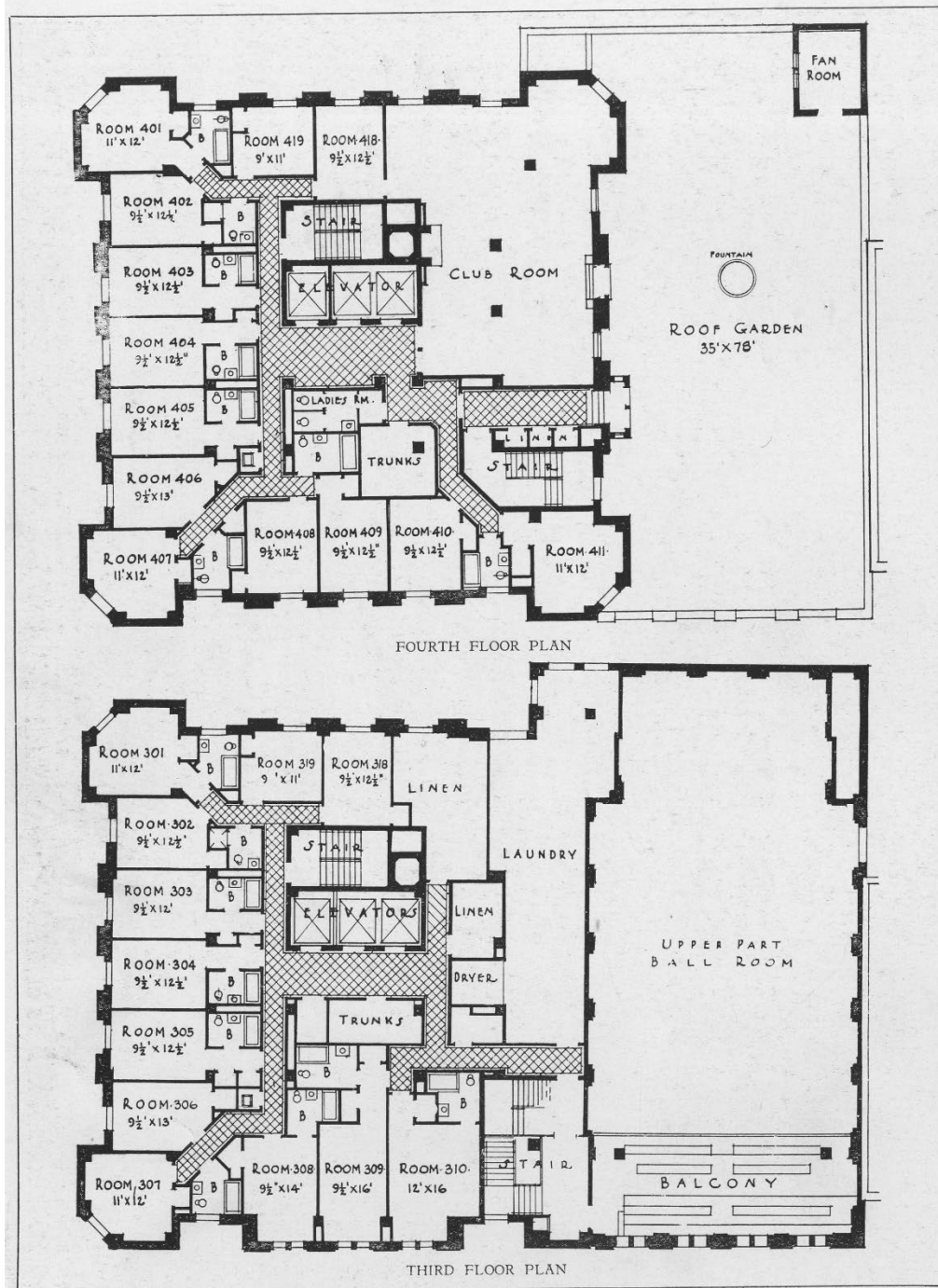


Figure 2.58: Third and fourth floor plans, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 798.



PANHELLENIC TOWER, NEW YORK CITY
BALL ROOM INTERIOR

Figure 2.59: Ball room interior of Panhellenic Tower. Undated. John Mead Howells, *John Mead Howells* (New York: Architectural Catalog Co., 193-).



Figure 2.60: "Tree of Life", a reception room in green and silver, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 805.



Figure 2.61: Solarium on twenty-sixth floor, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 807.

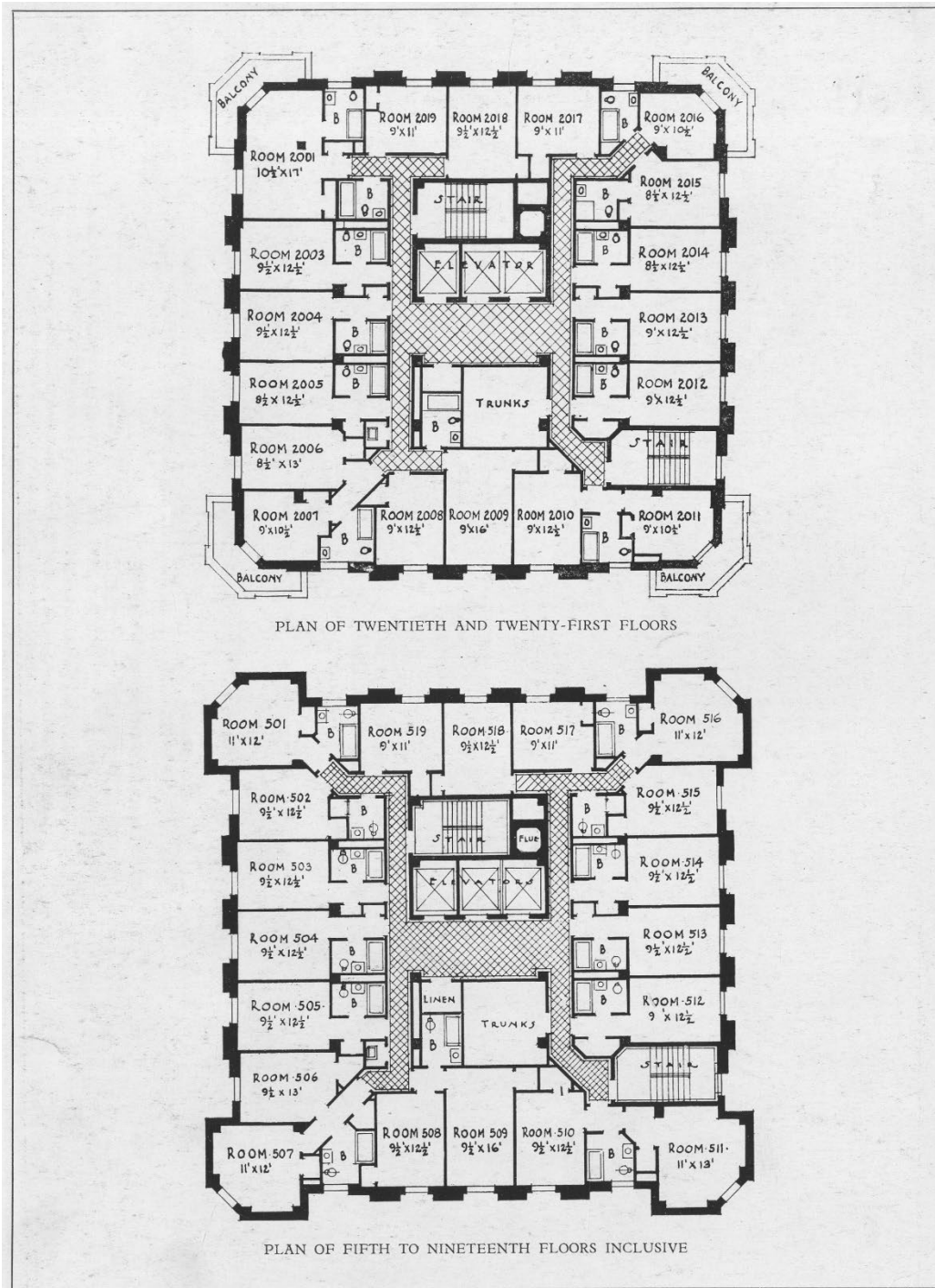


Figure 2.62: Typical plans of 5th-19th and 20th-21st floors, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 804.

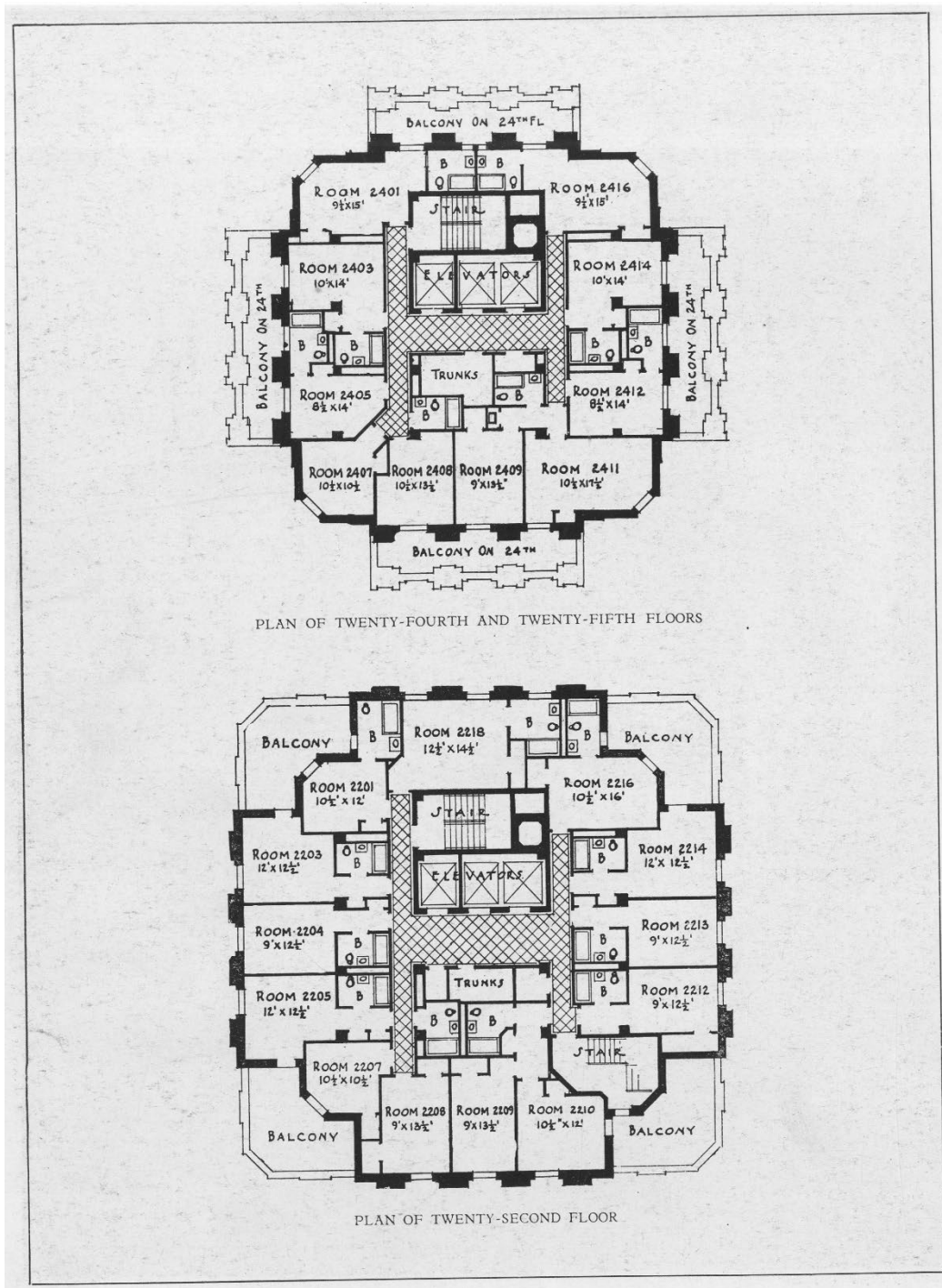


Figure 2.63: Plans of 22rd floor and 24th-25th floors, 1928. *The American Architect* 134 (Dec 1928), 804.



Figure 2.64: Eleanor Roosevelt greeting women in the Panhellenic House at the Democratic Rally, 1932. Alamy.

American Woman's Association Clubhouse

Opened in 1929, the clubhouse of the American Woman's Association served as a home with companionship, where women from different professions could meet, intermingle and learn from each other (Figure 2.65, 2.66).¹⁴⁶ The organization created "Miss Robinson Crusoe" as the symbol and patron of New York's business women, and wrote a song to depict the lonesome image of a woman who was a stranger to Manhattan and the club as a friendly haven (Figure 2.67, 2.68): "Little Miss Robinson Crusoe/How in the world could you do so/Without the pals that you knew so well/...So we're planning a little rendezvous/That you can come to/Little Miss Robinson Crusoe/We don't want you to be blue..." Besides comfort and convenience, its

¹⁴⁶ "Miss Anne Morgan Explains Aim of Women's Clubhouse," *New York Times*, Apr 26, 1925.

promoter also conceived the clubhouse as a center for women's political, civic and cultural education.¹⁴⁷

The history of the American Woman's Association went back to 1911, when it was known as "The Vacation Association," led by Gertrude Robinson Smith and Anne Morgan. This institution was founded to improve the health and recreation of working-class women by increasing chances of vacations in salubrious locations at moderate prices.¹⁴⁸ In 1922, the Vacation Association dissolved and the American Woman's Association was organized with a new focus on middle-class and elite white women.¹⁴⁹ The membership of the American Woman's Association was drawn from 190 different professions and business enterprises in and around New York City, which included "musicians, doctors, lawyers, painters, sculptors, writers, bank employees, secretaries, teachers and women who own business in many fields."¹⁵⁰ By 1925, the club had a vital, active membership of 3,617: "The business and professional woman is no longer a matter of astonishment, but an acknowledged successful fact. The astonishing thing about it is the number of these women earning their living in the world today!"¹⁵¹ As the membership of A.W.A. continued to grow, an idea took root and a stock-selling campaign was launched by Gertrude Robinson Smith and Anne Morgan to finance a permanent clubhouse (Figure 2.69-2.72).¹⁵² When the association announced that it would build a clubhouse, which would be as lavish and complete as any men's club in the city, the immediate response was overwhelming. The first fundraising assembly was held at Carnegie

¹⁴⁷ "Women's Clubhouse Seen as Civic and Romantic Center," *New York Herald*, May 6, 1925.

¹⁴⁸ Lina D. Miller, *The New York Charities Directory* (New York: Charity Organization Society in the City of New York, 1916), 316.

¹⁴⁹ "American Woman's Association Clubhouse," *The New York City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists*, accessed Feb 21, 2019, <http://www.nycago.org/Organs/NYC/html/AmericanWomansAssoc.html>.

¹⁵⁰ "Many Speak about Rooms in Woman's Club," *New York Times*, Apr 14, 1929.

¹⁵¹ "Miss Morgan Tells How Five Women Grew to be Club," *New York Herald*, April 12, 1925. "The American Woman's Association New Club House Assured," *Carry On* 5 no.4 (Nov 1926), 15.

¹⁵² "The American Woman's Association New Club House Assured," *Carry On* 5 (Nov 1926), 16.

Hall in April 1925; so many women attended that the police was called to keep order. More than five thousand women were turned away from the rally, however, five of them reached the hall by climbing up a steep iron ladder to one of the lower corridors.¹⁵³ When the clubhouse opened on April 12, 1929, a reception was held for eight thousand members and their friends. From the sub-basement to the roof garden, the entire building was thronged with visitors.¹⁵⁴

The twenty-three-story clubhouse, at 353 West 57th Street, was an imposing structure designed by architect Benjamin Wistar Morris. Its total cost, including the 29,000 square feet plot of land, the building, all furnishings and equipment, taxes and interest during the period of construction, was approximately \$7,230,000.¹⁵⁵ There were 1,200 bedrooms, each with private bath, ranging from ten to twenty-five dollars a week (Figure 2.73); the fifth floor was the first rental floor because the third floor rooms were reserved for transient members, and the fourth floor for other transients including friends and relatives of members.¹⁵⁶ The clubhouse featured an auditorium with a seating capacity of one thousand; the auditorium had a mezzanine balcony, assembly lounges and a private entrance on 58th Street (Figure 2.74).¹⁵⁷ Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, chairman of the committee that was in charge of interior decoration and furnishings, contributed antiques she collected in European shops and auctions to the sitting rooms on the mezzanine; on the second floor, the main dining room was decorated in marbleized shades of tan, a scheme discovered by Mrs. Vanderbilt in a Paris shop, and the music room was in white and gold (Figure 2.75).¹⁵⁸ A gallery lounge, a library, writing and card rooms, dressing rooms with baths for non-resident members, administrative offices and

¹⁵³ "5,000 Turned Away at Manless Rally," *New York Times*, Apr 28, 1925.

¹⁵⁴ "10,000 at Opening of Women's Club," *New York Times*, Apr 13, 1929.

¹⁵⁵ "The American Woman's Association New Club House Assured," *Carry On* 5 (Nov 1926), 16.

¹⁵⁶ "Many Seek Rooms in Woman's Club," *New York Times*, Apr 14, 1929.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

infirmary were in the third floor (Figure 2.76-2.78).¹⁵⁹ A guest would also find four roof gardens - two on top of the building and two on the fourteenth floor, where she could take her coffee after dinner on a summer evening and enjoy breezes from the Hudson River.¹⁶⁰ In the sub-basement the clubhouse had a double height gymnasium with the most advanced equipment, and a swimming pool sixty-five feet long and twenty-five wide.¹⁶¹

Although leaders of the A.W.A. rejected being labeled as “feminist” – a term associated with radical lawlessness and antigovernment “Bolshevist” conspiracies in the 1920s, what they promoted was on behalf of women and what they achieved were feminist goals.¹⁶² In 1931, Eleanor Roosevelt visited the clubhouse and spoke on “The Responsibilities of Women to Their Government”; she sent a note of appreciation for entrepreneurial opportunities the A.W.A. had introduced to both established women and young women just beginning business life.¹⁶³ Moreover, the strategic location of the clubhouse, together with the facilities of its auditorium, made it the logical center for political meeting of both the Republican and Democratic parties. Ruth Baker Pratt, the first congresswoman (1929-1933) elected from New York, attended a dinner held by the Republican Business Women in the auditorium; Martha Byrne, at that time a Democratic candidate for the legislature from New York County, spoke at a Democratic rally there.¹⁶⁴ The clubhouse was also selected by many women’s organizations as an ideal place for their regular meetings and social activities; among those were the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, The League of Advertising Women of New York, Bank

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ “The American Woman’s Association New Club House Assured,” *Carry On* 5 (Nov 1926), 36.

¹⁶¹ “Many Seek Rooms in Woman’s Club,” *New York Times*, Apr 14, 1929.

¹⁶² Linda M. Grasso, *Equal under the Sky: Georgia O’Keeffe and Twentieth-Century Feminism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), 140.

¹⁶³ “The White House Washington,” *A.W.A Bulletin* 4 (Nov 1933), 1

¹⁶⁴ “Political Parties Use Clubhouse,” *A.W.A. Bulletin* 2 (Oct 1931), 4.

Women's Club, Home Economic Teachers Association, Hunter College, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Alpha Delta Phi and many others.¹⁶⁵ In 1935, the Women's Trade Union League held a ceremony in the clubhouse' auditorium, to honor Eleanor Roosevelt; around 1,200 guests attended, as did Mayor LaGuardia.¹⁶⁶ The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was founded in 1903 by various house workers and trade unionists. The league united women of different classes and backgrounds with an intention to improve conditions for all working women and children. Eleanor Roosevelt became a member of the WTUL in 1922, and was motivated to promote labor rights for women (Figure 2.79). Roosevelt reached out to women in the upper class and redirected the focus of upper class women from social standing to collaboration with other classes for legislation that would improve labor conditions.¹⁶⁷

The A.W.A. also supported women artists by establishing a gallery in which women could exhibit their work, awarded prizes for outstanding achievement, and disseminated women's artistic contributions.¹⁶⁸ Like other women's clubhouses in this era, interior decoration was often commissioned to women artists, and the Junior Lounge of A.W.A. contained a series of murals by Lucile Howard and M. Elizabeth Price.¹⁶⁹ In 1937, the clubhouse gallery exhibited twenty-five paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe to pay tribute to her twelve years' of progressive work.¹⁷⁰ In the same year, Anne Morgan planned an annual art exhibition known as the "Lucille Douglass Award Art Show", an event intended to honor the painter from Alabama, who

¹⁶⁵ "Clubhouse Popular with Women's Organizations," *A.W.A. Bulletin* 4 (Oct 1931): 6.

¹⁶⁶ "Mrs. Roosevelt, Mayor LaGuardia, to Attend Dinner," *A.W.A. Bulletin* 5 (Apr 1934): 1.

¹⁶⁷ "Trousers Won't Do the Trick: Eleanor Roosevelt and Feminism," Bard University, accessed Feb 26, 2019, <https://omekalib.bard.edu/exhibits/show/erfeminism/workingwoman>.

¹⁶⁸ Linda M. Grasso, *Equal Under the Sky: Georgia O'Keeffe and Twentieth-Century Feminism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), 70.

¹⁶⁹ Karen J. Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930* (Bloomington: Indianan University Press, 1994), 90-91.

¹⁷⁰ "Georgia O'Keeffe's One-Man Show to Contain 12 Years' Progressive Work," *A.W.A. Bulletin* (Mar 1937): 1.

“started by painting Christmas cards and lantern slides and through the latter activity found an opportunity to go to the Far East to make slides for a group of missionaries.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Warren A. McNeil, “Allied Artists’ Show Opens in Manhattan,” *The Sun*, May 23, 1937.

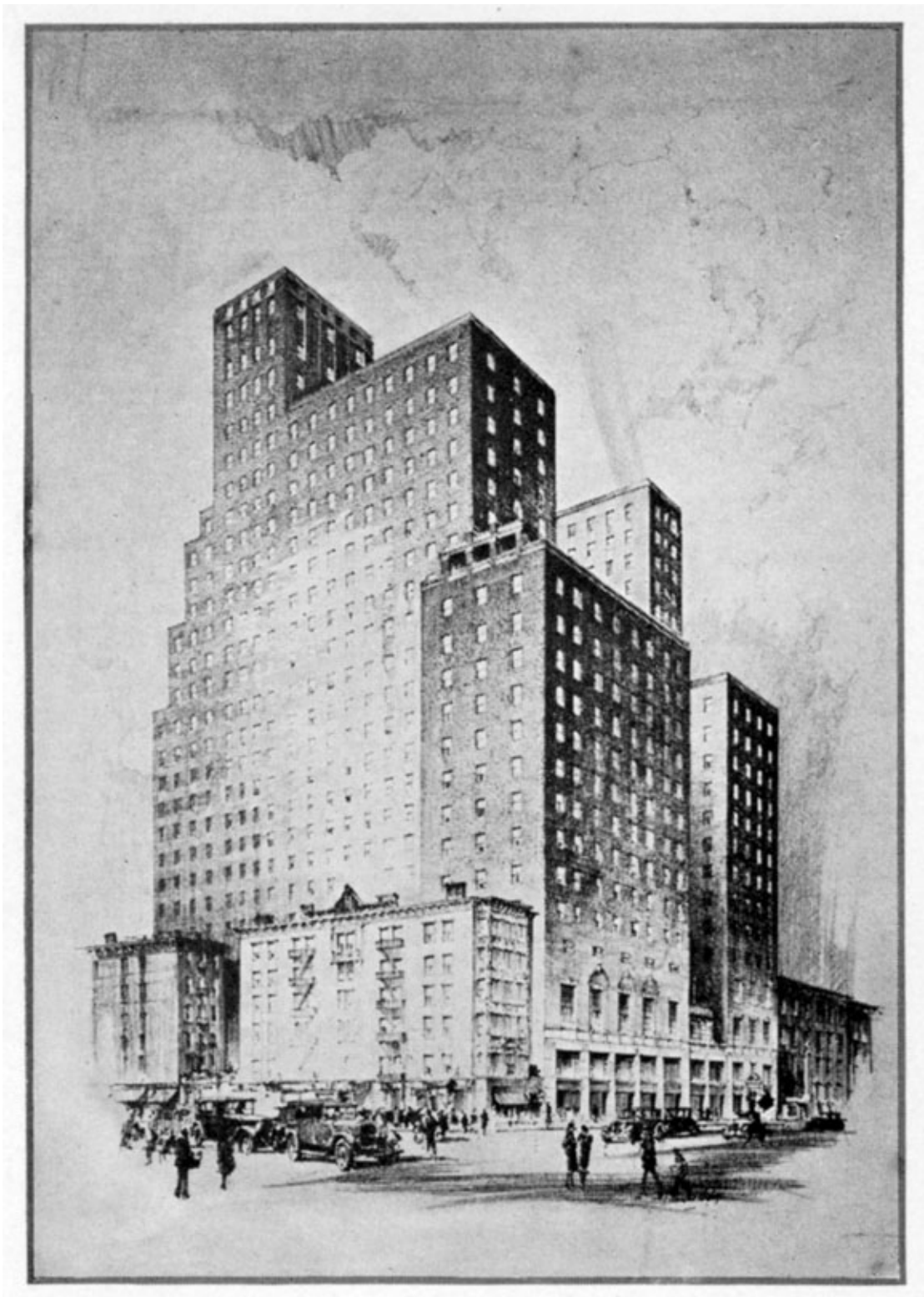


Figure 2.65: The American Woman's Association postcard, ca. 1920s -1930s. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.66: The A.W.A. clubhouse, in the lower left of the photo, was an imposing structure in its neighborhood, 1928. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.

Little Miss Robinson Crusoe
WORDS AND MUSIC by Vaughn De Leath

On a far away is-land long a-go
 So eto-ries go, lived Rob-in-son Cru-soe,
 (Interp.) He was lone-ly as he could be,
 Hunt-ed some-one for com-pan-y. But he found it
 ver-y hard to do so, (Coda) Hid-to-ry re-
 peats it-self, as the sa-ges say On the is-land
 of Man-hat-tan, it's the same to-day. In our
 midst is his de-scend-ant, Fair and in-de-pen-dent
 Looking for a friendly place to while the hours away,

Copyright 1925 by the American Woman's Association, Inc.
 220 Madison Ave., N. Y. C.

CHORUS

Lit-tle Miss Rob-in-son Crusoe, Now in the world could
 do so With-out the Pals that you knew so
 well? Your troubles are ov-er,
 You'll soon be in elo-ver, You'll not be a
 ro-ver, With no place to dwell. Bees have a hive,
 birds have a tree, Ev-en they need com-pan-y.
 So we're planning a lit-tle ren-des-vous, That
 you can come to. Lit-tle Miss Robinson Cra-soe,
 We don't want you to be blue, so We'll have a Club that is
 new, so come on ov-er do.

Figure 2.67: Song *Little Miss Robinson Crusoe*. Undated. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.68: "Miss Robinson Crusoe - Her Island". Brochure cover of the A.W.A. Clubhouse. Undated. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.69: Gertrude Robinson Smith signing stock certificates for the clubhouse project, ca. 1925-1928. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.70: Gertrude Robinson Smith - "One shingle for each additional share of stock," ca. 1925-1928. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.71: The A.W.A. calling its members to buy stocks for the clubhouse's interior finish, ca. 1925-1928. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.72: Anne Morgan at the ground breaking ceremony of the A.W.A. Clubhouse, 1928. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.

Her Room

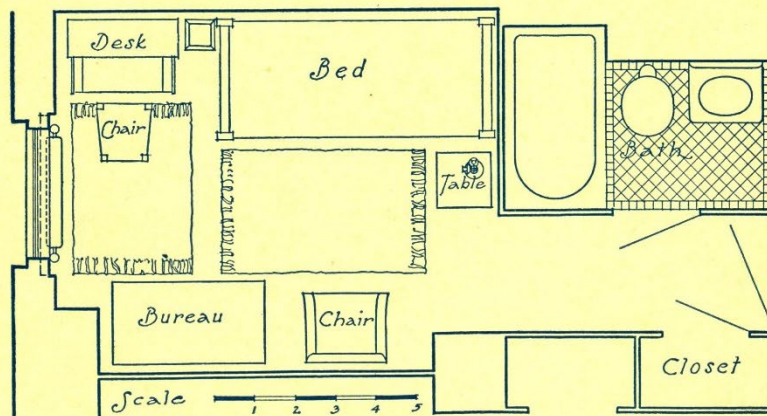
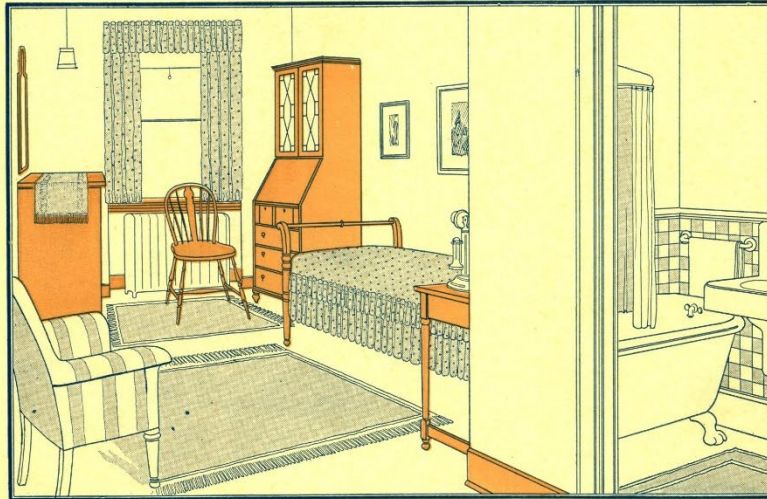


Figure 2.73: Drawing of a club member's bedroom with a private bathroom, ca.1929. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.

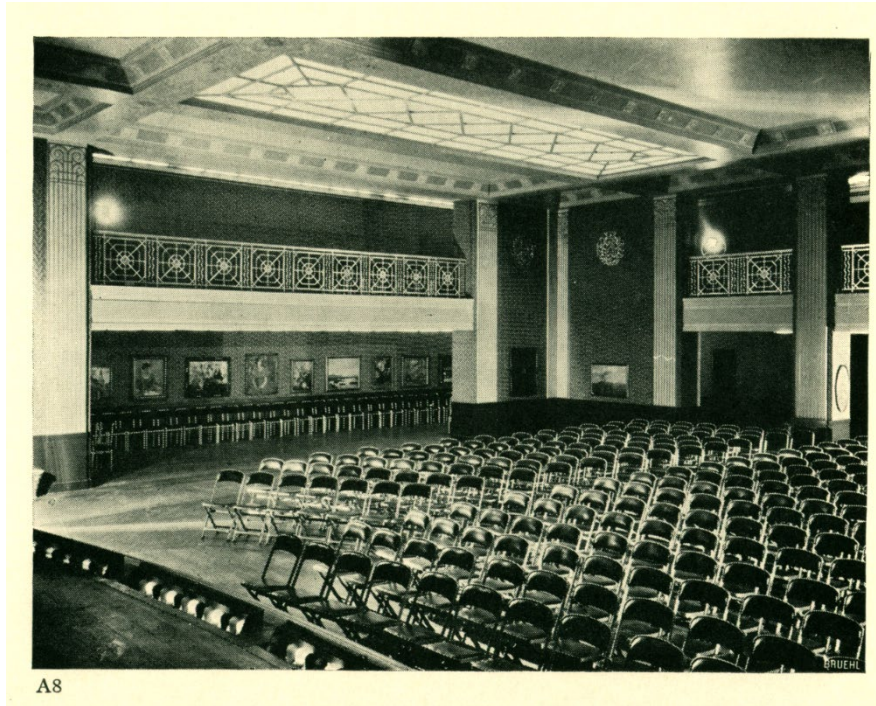


Figure 2.74: The auditorium in the A.W.A. Clubhouse, ca. 1929. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.75: The music room in the A.W.A. clubhouse, ca. 1929. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.

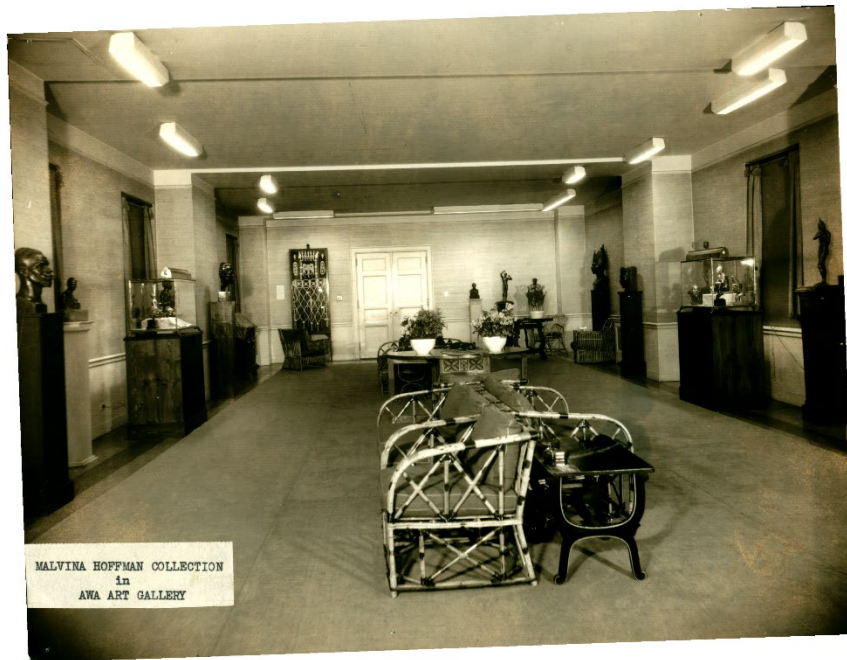


Figure 2.76: The art gallery in the A.W.A. Clubhouse, ca. 1929. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.77: The North-African room in the A.W.A. clubhouse, decorated with Chinese paintings, ca. 1929. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.

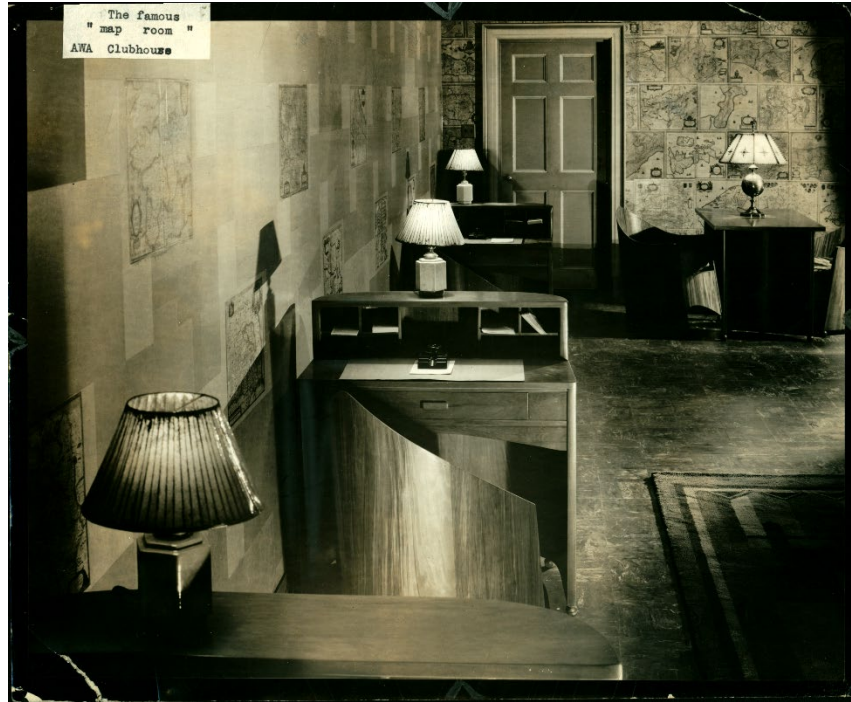


Figure 2.78: The writing room in the A.W.A. clubhouse, a.k.a. the "map room," ca. 1929. Barnard Archives and Special Collections. Barnard College.



Figure 2.79: Eleanor Roosevelt and Women's Trade Union League, 1954. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

CHAPTER THREE: DECLINE OF WOMEN'S RESIDENCES

A survey by the Bureau of Social Hygiene in 1922 stated that there were fifty-eight organized, nonprofit residences for self-supporting women and girls in Manhattan.¹⁷² Today, there are probably less than ten, including the Markel in Greenwich Village, the Jeanne d'Arc Residence in Chelsea, the Webster Apartment in Hudson Yards, Centro Maria Inc. and St. Joseph's Immigrant Home in Hell's Kitchen, St. Agnes Residence in Upper West Side and St. Mary's Residence in Upper East Side. All are owned by churches and charity groups. Some still have curfews and forbid alcohol. Regarding women's commercial hotels and clubhouses, none of them are running today.

In answering why non-profit residences still exist in the city, one assumption is that, in exchange for a rent that is much lower than the market price, some women are willing to compromise a little comfort, personal freedom and privacy. Today, the majority of guests living in non-profit residences are students and recent graduates, who have limited incomes and need to pay off student loans. After two decades of neoliberal urbanization, finding an affordable place to live in the city has become more and more of a challenge for ordinary people.¹⁷³

3.1 Causes of Decline

The decline of women's hotels resulted from a combination of causes. The Great Depression, starting in 1929, crucially weakened women's financial capability and was particularly detrimental to the survival of clubhouses. According to a survey by the American Woman's Association, the percentage of unemployed working women rose rapidly during the

¹⁷² *Housing Conditions of Employed Women in the Borough of Manhattan* (New York: Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1922), 19.

¹⁷³ Alessandro Busa, *The Creative Destruction of New York City: Engineering the City for the Elite* (New York: Oxford University, 2017), 237.

Depression: with an estimate of thirteen percent in January 1931, changing to twenty-three percent in the first months of 1934.¹⁷⁴ The percentage of women working in the professions fell from 14.2 in 1930 to 12.3 in 1940; compared to the boom years, it became more difficult for women to compete in male-dominated careers or secure higher positions. During the 1930s, the proportion of women who earned advanced degrees declined in comparison to men, and even in women's colleges, the number of female faculty members fell.¹⁷⁵

As women's wages slid and female students dropped out of colleges, a limited clientele no longer sustained the operation of the Panhellenic House and the hotel began to accept non-sorority women in 1931. The building was finally rebranded as the Beekman Tower and opened to both sexes in 1934, although the tower continued to be the headquarters of the National Panhellenic Fraternities.¹⁷⁶ The clubhouse of the American Woman's Association almost made it through the Great Depression. At the edge of bankruptcy, the association surrendered and opened its door to the public in 1941. To avoid confusion, the building was renamed the Henry Hudson Hotel. Facilities were accessible to all guests, except for the gymnasium and a swimming pool which were reserved for the exclusive use of women. The A.W.A. retained its library, lounge and club headquarters.¹⁷⁷ During World War II, U.S. Army troops were quartered on several floors of the Henry Hudson Hotel, waiting for transport to Europe. Civilian employees from out of town were trained in the Office of War Information at 250 West 57th Street for overseas duty, and they were also temporarily housed there.¹⁷⁸ Considering the

¹⁷⁴ American Woman's Association, *Women Workers through the Depression* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 20-23.

¹⁷⁵ William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 101.

¹⁷⁶ "Rename the Panhellenic House, Beekman Tower," *New York Herald Tribune*, Sep 16, 1934.

¹⁷⁷ "Woman's Club Is Now Hudson Hotel," *New York Herald Tribune*, Jan 14, 1941.

¹⁷⁸ "Henry Hudson Hotel in World War II," *New York Times*, Jan 25, 1998.

war condition, in 1942, the A.W.A. finally abandoned 237 West 58th Street, and squeezed its headquarters onto the fourteenth floor of Barclay Hotel at 111 East 47th Street.¹⁷⁹

The decade after World War II witnessed a renaissance of domesticity in American society. The war machine had drawn millions of women into the workforce and moved them a step closer to equality, but immediately after the war ended, women were kicked out of the industrial workforce to make way for men returned from the battlefield. Despite women's enthusiasm and devotion during the war years, which had won them respect and gratitude from the nation, public opinion reversed to attack the idea of women participating as equals in the workforce. The media was full of articles that preached clichés about women's inadequacy and questioned women's capacity to compete with men.¹⁸⁰ In 1946, Margaret Pickel, dean of Barnard College, quoted a chemist's report suggesting that "women lack the gift for teamwork that makes for coordinated research." In her view, women had such inherent defects as "less physical strength, a lower fatigue point, and a less stable nervous system."¹⁸¹ Moreover, to restore normalcy after the disturbance of war, educators and policymakers were instilling the message to American women that they should recommit themselves to family, as patriotic defenders of traditional American values. In her 1963 publication *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan noted that, by the end of 1950s, the average marriage age of American women dropped to twenty, and fourteen million girls were engaged by seventeen. By the mid-1950s, sixty per cent of college students terminated their education halfway to marry, because those women feared that excessive education would be a handicap. Phenomenally, in the late 1950s, only a third of American

¹⁷⁹ "Old Headquarters Given Up by A.W.A.," *New York Times*, Sep 24, 1942.

¹⁸⁰ William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 154-157.

¹⁸¹ Margaret Barnard Pickel, "'How Come No Jobs for Women,'" *New York Times*, Jan 27, 1946.

women were working outside the home. Most of them were married and no longer young; they took up part-time jobs in order to share their husbands' burden.¹⁸²

The reviving public concern with *home* overlapped with an extensive exodus to the suburbs. Since very few new houses had been built in nearly twenty years of stagnation, when soldiers came home to start their own families, a huge housing crisis was triggered. During this period, the developed capacity of large builders to take raw suburban land and apply mass production methods to residential construction, the federal incentives that favored suburbanization, together with the advertising of an improved living standard, caused people to abandon the cities and relocate in new suburban districts.¹⁸³ Shortly between 1947 to 1951, the firm Levitt & Sons built 17,450 houses in Levittown, Long Island, creating a brand-new community of 75,000 people.¹⁸⁴ All of sudden, the suburb became the expression of a bright new way of life, a middle-class effort to uplift from the disorder in the metropolis. Seeing that housewives dominated the suburban community throughout the day, Lewis Mumford joked that it was a retreat to the archaic matriarchy, "in a more playful and relaxed mood."¹⁸⁵ Typically, a suburban housewife's life revolved exclusively around the duties of households and child bearing. Publications like Dr. Benjamin Spock's best-selling *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* emphasized that a good mother should be constantly attentive to her child's changing physical and emotional needs.

¹⁸² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 15-17.

¹⁸³ Barry Checkoway, "Large Builders, Federal Housing Programmes, and Postwar Suburbanization," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 4 (March 1980): 21-45.

¹⁸⁴ "Levitt's Progress," *Fortune* 46 (Oct 1952): 155.

¹⁸⁵ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961): 487-496.

While the suburban life became an aspiration for many young American women, not everyone defined themselves by marriage or motherhood or home-making. In the white-collar workforce, the war enhanced the feminization of lower office positions, and the trend persisted after the war. By 1950, over three fifths of the office workers and over one third of the sales workers were women.¹⁸⁶ By 1956, more than two-thirds of the clerical workers were female; the number of female clerical workers, which was over six million, surpassed the wartime peak by over one million.¹⁸⁷ In most of the conventionally male professions, women were catching up very slowly. At least until 1940, men still occupied ninety-seven percent or more of the “lawyers, dentists, architects, natural scientists and engineers,” and ninety-five percent of the doctors. The only profession that women had made steady and tremendous gains was journalism. In 1870, ninety percent of the editors and reporters were male; by 1950, nearly one third were women.¹⁸⁸ Though the ratio of postwar women collegians dropped due to the influx of male veterans, their absolute numbers revealed an upward trend.¹⁸⁹ In the 1930s, 4,035 women earned doctoral degrees in the United States; 4,450 in the 1940s; and in the first five years of 1950s, 4,464.¹⁹⁰

By the early 1960s, marriage as a national ideology imposed on women, had lost some of its mesmerizing power. The 1960 census found that 9.3 million households, around eighteen out of one hundred, were headed by single women. Most of those women were identified as widows and divorcees, but still, there were 1.4 million of them who had never married.¹⁹¹ To relieve

¹⁸⁶ National Manpower Council, *Womanpower* (New York: Columbia University, 1957), 119-120.

¹⁸⁷ Mary Christine Anderson, “Gender, Class, and Culture: Women Secretarial and Clerical Workers in the United States, 1925-1955” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1986), 144.

¹⁸⁸ National Manpower Council, *Womanpower* (New York: Columbia University, 1957), 124-125.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁹⁰ Rita Anne Burdett, “A Comparative Study of Women Granted Doctoral Degrees from the New York University School of Education and Women in General with PhD and EdD Degrees” (PhD diss., New York University, 1958), 169.

¹⁹¹ Betsy Israel, *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. Morrow, 2002), 208-209.

themselves from suffocating fiancés or dull jobs, many young women left home for New York City and working opportunities in theater, dance, publishing and other fields. Written by Helen Gurley Brown (then the editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan* magazine for thirty-two years), *Sex and the Single Girl* was the best seller in 1962, an eye-opening handbook for girls who grew up in the sexually stymied 1950s. Featuring a forthright and realistic style, this book sought to smash the sexual double standard between men and women, and legitimize premarital sex for women. It challenged the notion that family life was the only satisfying end for women, and promoted single women's individual fulfillment.¹⁹² One important piece of advice given by the author was, "If you are to be a glamorous, sophisticated woman that exciting things happen to, you need an apartment and you need to live it alone!" Brown reminded her readers that a chic apartment is a manifesto to the world that you are not "one of those miserable, pitiful single creatures." For women with a limited budget, she suggested that it's not necessary to rent a luxury apartment to show off; the key is to make you and your furniture impressive, therefore "Nobody will remember they came through a slum to get to you."¹⁹³

Some single women in New York City admitted that, while occasionally they felt lonely and wanted to have an intimate relationship, they took pride in their independence, especially when comparing themselves to the "helpless" suburban housewives, who, in their view, "can't even find the key-hole of their car doors without their husbands' help." To those women, the real problem rooted in the social and cultural norm that revered marriage and held bias against single women, who were often seen as unstable tenants - defaulting on leases and leaving like thieves in the night. In contrast, women with a "Mrs." in front of their names were usually

¹⁹² Ellen Kay Trimberger, *The New Single Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 23-24.

¹⁹³ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Avon Books, 1983), 105-121.

authorized with extra job benefits, including maternity benefits, even though they were widowed or divorced.¹⁹⁴ Traditionally, while single men could live alone into their thirties, women tended to group together, for economy and safety, or stayed with relatives until marriage. But as more and more people began to postpone or avoid marriage and bearing children, and as a growing divorce rate separated couples, single tenants, especially single women, became more acceptable to landlords. Established in a career, those single women were inclined to pay for a better environment and more privacy. According to an interview done by the *New York Times* in 1974, an advertising account executive stated that, "I couldn't go through the roommate scene again...I've grown independent and developed my own ways of doing things."¹⁹⁵

Well into the 1970s, thanks to the women's liberation movement, it was no longer "fashionable" to stay in a women's hotel. Instead, women wanted and had the ability to enjoy greater autonomy and visibility.¹⁹⁶ The birth control pills available from 1960, the Supreme Court's decision on the legalized use of contraception from 1963 and establishing women's legal right to abortion in 1973, together with the language of sexual freedom circulating in the mass media, made it possible for women to approach sex in a way that was equal to men's.¹⁹⁷ For long, women's residences had played the role of a chaperon, sheltering and protecting women from dangers of the city, especially from men's sexual harassment. However, the issue of women's protection was always problematic for feminists. In the end, if a woman needs to be protected

¹⁹⁴ Judy Klemesrud, "They Tell How They Feel About Being Single Women," *New York Times*, Dec 5, 1974.

¹⁹⁵ Wendy Schuman, "Singles Becoming More Stable Tenants," *New York Times*, July 4, 1974.

¹⁹⁶ Connie Lauerman, "Barbizon Hotel: Still Home Away from Home for Women," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec 28, 1977.

¹⁹⁷ Jane F. Gerhard, *Deserting Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of Twentieth-Century American Sexual Thought* (New York: Columbia University, 2001), 81.

from men, she is rendered weak, and therefore, not equal to men.¹⁹⁸ In response to the 1960s “watch your step” prescriptions for urban women, Susan Brownmiller stated that, “to impose a special burden of caution on women is no solution at all,” and accepting the burden only helped “reinforce the concept that women must live and move about in fear and can never expect to achieve the personal freedom, independence, and self-assurance of men.”¹⁹⁹ According to Brownmiller, almost every woman in a metropolis confronted with street harassment on a daily basis: a catcall from a truck driver or a murmured “suck my dick” from a mild-looking fellow dressed in a business suit. It’s not until the rise of Second Wave Feminism that women felt socially sanctioned to speak about sexual matters. In June 1970, Karla Jay and Alix Kates Schulman used the tactic “Ogle-In” on Wall Street, to give men a taste of being whistled at.²⁰⁰ In the late 1970s, feminists’ concern with sexual violence brought forth the “Take Back the Night” marches, which emboldened women to reclaim public space and to lean on themselves for self-defense.²⁰¹

On the other hand, by modern standards, the women’s residences had scarce amenities and small bedrooms, and were barely equipped with private baths; televisions were not included and extra fees were charged for air-conditioning. By 1979, only three women’s commercial hotels survived: The Martha Washington, the Allerton House for Women, and the Barbizon. Their basic market consisted of women in transition, meaning women who were newly widowed or divorced, or young girls coming to New York before they found apartments and jobs. Those women needed safety, a good location and a reasonably priced room, for a month or

¹⁹⁸ Zillah R Eisenstein, *Feminism and Sexual Equality: Crisis in Liberal America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 246-254.

¹⁹⁹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 449.

²⁰⁰ Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1999), 194-196.

²⁰¹ Marilyn S. Johnson, “The Career Girl Murders: Gender, Race, and Crime in 1960s New York,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 39 (Spring/Summer 2011): 244-261.

two while they got themselves together.²⁰² In addition, such hotels were ideal for businesswomen who travelled to New York for a conference. With no intent at dating, safety and economy were their major concerns.²⁰³ According to a long-time manager of the Allerton House for Women, more than forty percent of their guests were over the age of sixty. Those women were more vulnerable to the rising cost of apartments and prioritized quiet and tidiness.²⁰⁴ However, it doesn't mean that single-sex hotels had no appeal to young women. Some found the no-men rule quite handy for getting rid of a date at two a.m.²⁰⁵

From the 1990s, New York City has experienced drastic gentrification, which featured redevelopment projects, rising rents and the resulting displacement of lower-income households.²⁰⁶ When the real estate market is high, it's difficult for non-profits to compete with the private capital. Some women's residences were demolished for high-rise development, some were restructured in response to the booming tourism in the city, and some were converted to luxury condominiums. For example, the building at 18 Gramercy Park, was a women's residence until 2008. It was sold by the Salvation Army in 2010.²⁰⁷ This residence was not unpopular. In 2005, it was almost always at full occupancy and had nearly 300 residents.²⁰⁸ But the tenants were forced to leave because their landlord, the second-largest non-profit in the U.S., had deliberately stopped elevators and cleaning services.²⁰⁹ In the hands of the developers

²⁰² Suzanne Daley, "A Simple Success Story: The Last Women's Hotels," *New York Times*, Nov 25, 1979.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Connie Lauerman, "Barbizon Hotel: Still Home Away from Home for Women," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec 28, 1977.

²⁰⁶ Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi, "Gentrification and Displacement: New York City in the 1990s," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 70 (Nov 26, 2007): 39-52.

²⁰⁷ The building at 18 Gramercy Park was built in 1927 as a commercial hotel for women. It was purchased by the Salvation Army in 1961 and redirected as a non-profit residence for women. The Salvation Army is a Protestant Christian church and a charitable organization.

"Salvation Army Acquires Hotel," *New York Times*, Oct 5, 1961.

²⁰⁸ Steven Kurutz, "On Gramercy Park, an Old-Fashioned Girl," *New York Times*, Sept 25, 2005.

²⁰⁹ Manny Fernandez, "Twist in Eviction Fight: Charity as Landlord," *New York Times*, Sept 16, 2007.

Zeckendorf Brothers and the architect Robert Stern, who wanted to reproduce their success at 15 Central Park West with sky-high prices, the seventeen-story dormitory is converted into sixteen upscale condominiums.

3.2 Existing Women's Residences

Opened in 1912, the Jeanne d'Arc Residence at 253 W 24th Street represents one of the longest-running residences, and is operated by Catholic nuns of the Congregation of Divine Providence (Figure 3.1). Although crucifixes, statues of Jeanne d'Arc, and Christian iconography are everywhere to be found in the home, Jeanne d'Arc Residence welcomes women of different faiths (Figure 3.2). Online feedbacks from recent tenants, most of whom were students and foreign born, reveal that the rent price is "incredibly" affordable given the convenient location in Chelsea. Depending on the room size, the rent ranges from \$570 to \$920, plus \$35 utilities, per month.²¹⁰ The curfew has been suspended for years, but the Sisters stick to their non-men and no-guest-in-the-room policy. Bathrooms and kitchens are "communal," clean and never crowded (Figure 3.3, 3.4). Wi-fi is available in the library and dining hall (Figure 3.5). The residence also provides a free rehearsal room, which is frequently used by artists, and a gorgeous rooftop view of Midtown (Figure 3.6). Overall the home is chaste and plain in style, but it has a community mentality and encourages tenants from all around the world to intermingle with each other. Having been supporting and promoting women for more than one hundred and twenty years, the Jeanne d'Arc Residence keeps acting as a stepping stone, assisting women in becoming real New Yorkers.

²¹⁰ Jessica Dailey, "Inside New York's Last Remaining All-Women Apartment Buildings," *New York Post*, March 13, 2019.



Figure 3.1: The Jeanne d'Arc Residence at 253 West 24th Street. Photo by the author. March 8, 2019.



Figure 3.2: Library in the Jeanne d'Arc Residence. Photo by the author. March 8, 2019.



Figure 3.3: Shared bathroom in Jeanne d'Arc Residence. Photo by the author. March 8, 2019.



Figure 3.4: Shared kitchen in the Jeanne d'Arc Residence. Photo by the author. March 8, 2019.



Figure 3.5: Dining room of the Jeanne d'Arc Residence, facing the courtyard. Photo by the author. March 8, 2019.



Figure 3.6: View of the Empire State Building from the rooftop of Jeanne d'Arc Residence. Photo by the author.

March 8, 2019.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESERVING HER HERITAGE

The current built environment of New York City perpetuates the gender inequality of our history. It is noted that there are only five statues of named women in New York City: Joan of Arc, Golda Meir, Gertrude Stein, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Harriet Tubman. The medieval Joan of Arc was installed in the Riverside Park in 1915; before that, the city's statuary only commemorated men.²¹¹ To fix the gender imbalance represented in streets and parks, the city has recently announced to raise statues of five women - Billie Holiday, Helen Rodriguez Trias, Elizabeth Jennings, Katherine Walker and Shirley Chishom, which will be placed in boroughs that they once called home.²¹²

On the other hand, starting from October 2017, the "Me Too" movement has triggered a lasting public debate on the uneven social and political powers of men and women, which underpins the systemic sexual abuse and harassment in society. Although the "Me Too" movement has been criticized as "Twitter feminism", a naïve fantasy invented by narcissistic millennials, it has motivated a new round of research and discussion on the sexist cultural codes that prevent women from achieving personal happiness, and drawn the public's attention on women's history of liberation movement. In the same year, New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission launched "NYC Landmarks and the Vote at 100," an interactive story map that celebrates the centennial of women's gaining full voting rights in New York State. Through more than forty New York City landmarks, viewers can learn the advancement of the suffrage movement for American women. The story map consists of seven chapters, focusing on leaders,

²¹¹ Allison Meier, "The Only Five Public Statues of Historic Women in NYC," Hyperallergic, accessed on March 31, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/226186/the-only-five-public-statues-of-historic-women-in-nyc/>.

²¹² Julia Jacobs, "New York Will Add 4 Statues of Women to Help Fix 'Glaring' Gender Gap in Public Art," *New York Times*, March 6, 2019.

advocators and patrons in the movement, such as Inez Milholland, Lillian Wald and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Emily Hepburn is cited in the last chapter, for her leadership in developing the Panhellenic Tower and her devotion to women's rights struggle.²¹³

To better represent women's legacy in New York City, besides documenting and interpreting the more readily visible aspects of women's history at historic houses of famous figures, as well as in museum settings, there should be a more inclusive and accessible strategy of preserving women's heritage, which widens the variety of building types and landscapes associated with women's history.

In an essay in the book *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, Abigail Van Slyck refers to the skin-deep preservation, which sacrifices historic interiors, criticizing this as having gender implications. An emphasis on preserving the building's exterior tends to highlight the activities of men (male architects, male carpenters and masons, and male members of building trades); conversely, the destruction of historic interiors disproportionately obscures the activities of women, who often accepted responsibility for arranging the interiors of architectural shells designed, built and paid for by men.²¹⁴ Particularly in non-domestic buildings, the destruction of historic interiors eradicates evidence of women's work lives outside the home, reinforcing historical inaccuracies that suggest that women were once exclusively domestic creatures.

²¹³"NYC Landmarks and the Vote at 100," NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, accessed on May 3, 2019, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=6bd7801af0c64191b8e6376516df781e>.

²¹⁴ Abigail A. Van Slyck, "On the Inside, Preserving Women's History in American Libraries," in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, ed. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 145-160.

4.1 Existing Solutions for Women's Residences

For women's residences that have been landmarked, the new landlords have to maintain the integrity of building exteriors. Regarding the inner space, functionally it is impossible to keep the dormitory-like layout, and the original decorations are lost as they do not cater to the taste and marketing of the new project. The Panhellenic Tower, which had been rebranded as the Beekman Tower in 1934, was then remodeled into a luxury apartment hotel in 1965. The new hotel was characterized with open views on all four sides and drew its clientele mainly from the United Nations (Figure 4.1, 4.2).²¹⁵ The hotel contained 120 apartments, ranging in size from two to five rooms. Although the hotel's brick shell remained largely untouched, most of its interior was demolished.²¹⁶ In the case of 18 Gramercy Park, given the lucrative views of the only private park in Manhattan, Robert Stern's team put forward a strategy for enlarging the original windows, and convinced the Landmarks Preservation Commission that the alteration would not compromise the historical appearance, which was more modest and restrained (Figure 4.3).²¹⁷ To create full-floor residences, the serried partition walls of one-room apartments were knocked down (Figure 4.4). A spacious living room occupies the top bar of the E-shaped plan, where it spans the full width of four windows overlooking Gramercy Park. The two other bars of the "E" are fit with bedrooms each with en-suite baths. On the first floor, the original full-width lobby facing the Gramercy Park was refurbished with shallow white oak paneling accented with satin-finish stainless steel and cast-iron pilasters that give a touch of Art-Deco style.

²¹⁵ Arnold H. Lubasch, "Beekman Tower Being Remolded," *New York Times*, May 2, 1965.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Robert A. M. Stern, *City Living: Apartment Houses by Robert A. M. Stern Architects* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015), 208.

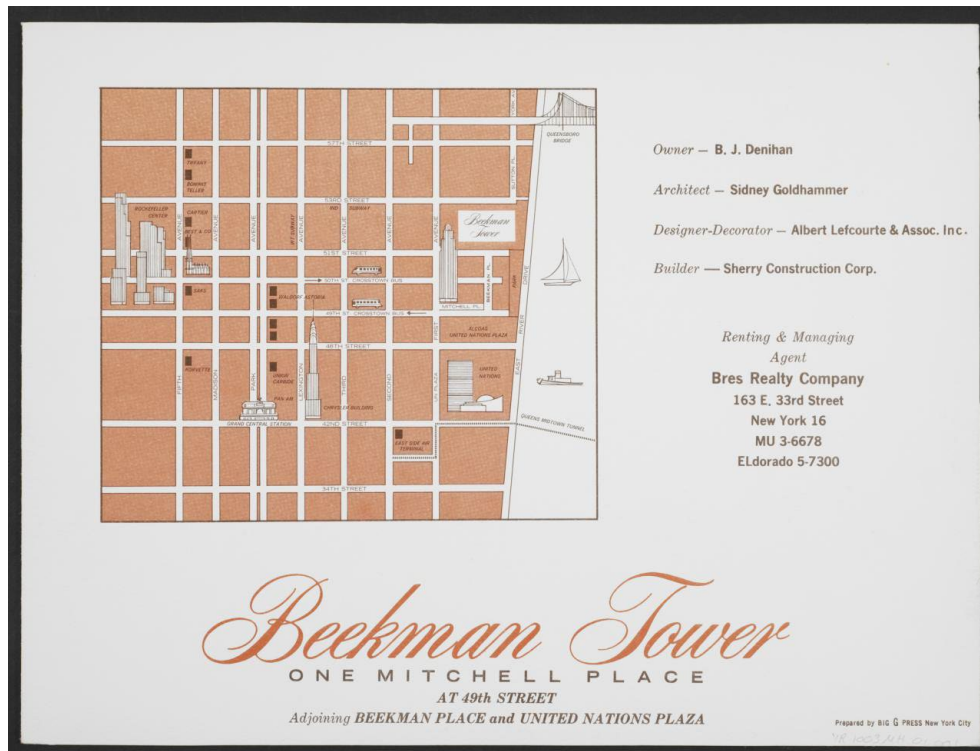


Figure 4.1 A real estate brochure of 3 Mitchell Place Inc., showing the Beekman Tower's convenience to the United Nations and East River Drive. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

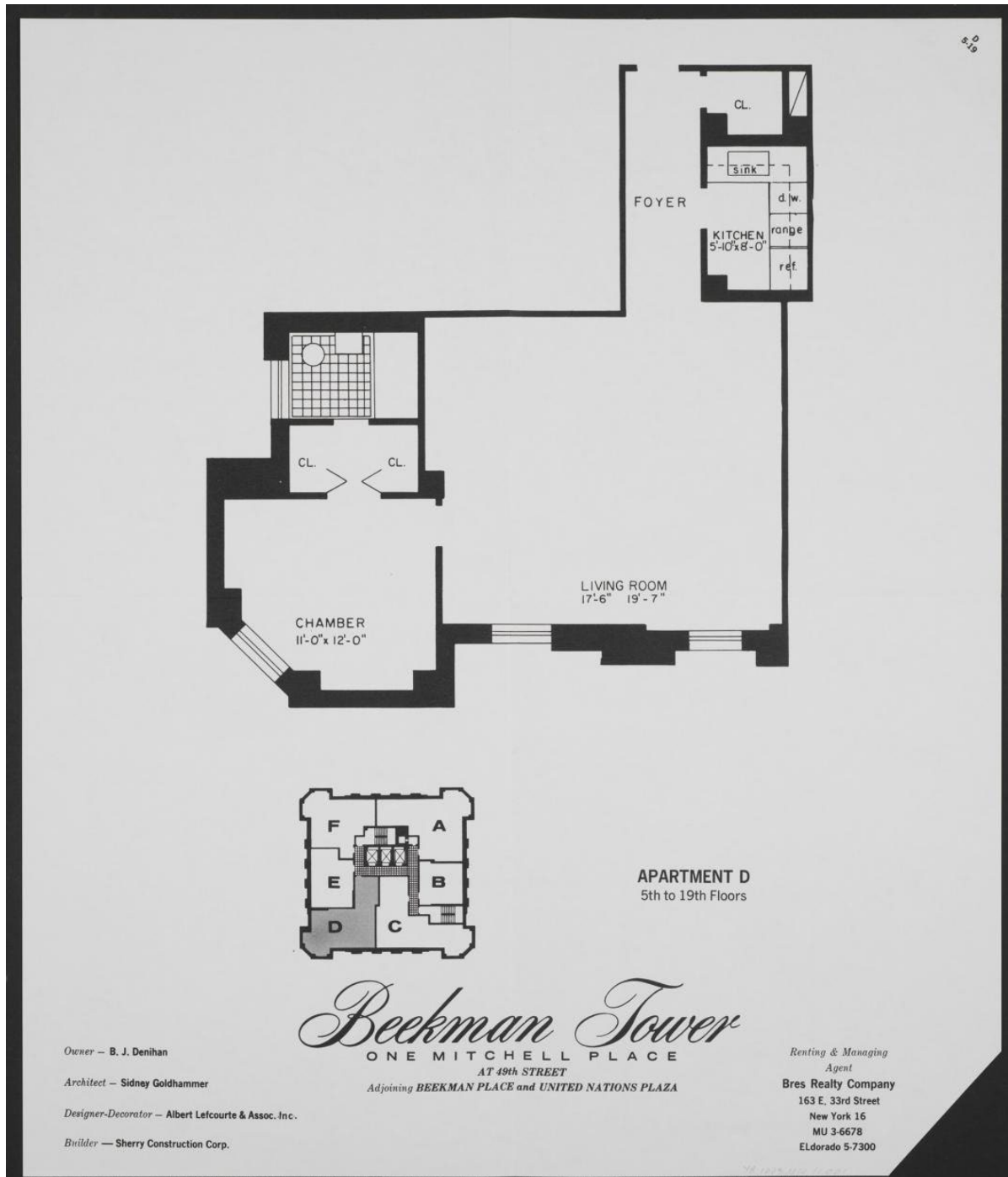


Figure 4.2: Apartment plan of the Beekman Tower, by architect Sidney Goldhammer. Apartment D: 5th to 19th floors.

Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

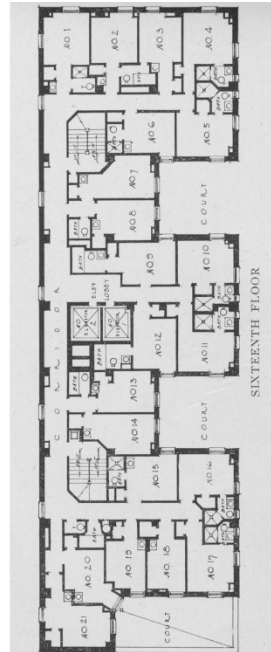


NORTH ELEVATION (BEFORE)

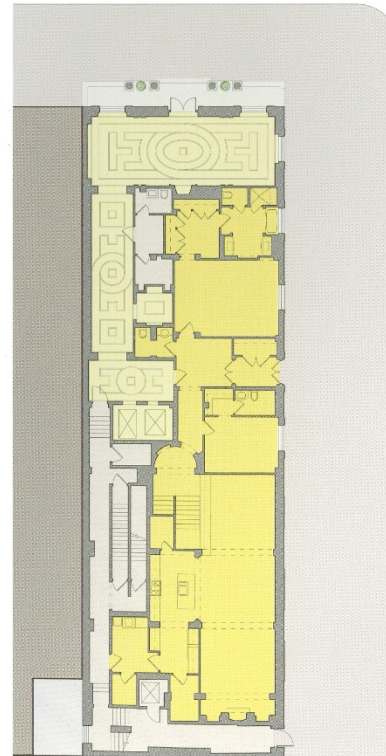
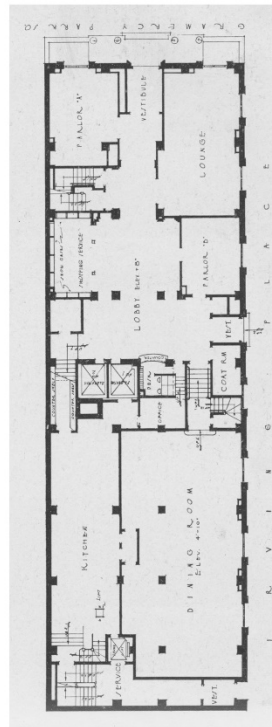


NORTH ELEVATION (AFTER)

Figure 4.3: The north elevation before and after renovation. Eighteen Gramercy Park. Robert A. M. Stern, *City Living: Apartment Houses by Robert A. M. Stern Architects* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015), 210.



TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Figure 4.4: Before and after floor plans. Eighteen Gramercy Park. *Architectural Forum* 52 (Feb 1930): 264. Robert A. M. Stern, *City Living: Apartment Houses by Robert A. M. Stern Architects* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015), 209.

In contrast to Robert Stern's aggressive renovation, another design team has proven the feasibility of interpreting and incorporating women's history into a new interior. In 2017, the rooftop lounge of the former Panhellenic Tower was bought by the House Merchants Hospitality Inc., and a new cocktail bar named Ophelia was opened in February 2018 (Figure 4.5). Ophelia features a greenhouse terrace and breathtaking views of East Midtown (Figure 4.6).²¹⁸ A female design team Public Agenda, was invited to work on this renovation project. The founders of Public Agenda, Laura Mueller-Soppart and Eliza Liepina, both in their late 20s, came across each other in a contemporary housing variant of the Panhellenic Tower: Airbnb. The two felt empathy for the historic women's lifestyle represented by this building and were willing to interweave female narratives into the interior of Ophelia. "A cabinet of curiosities" is the core idea of their design, for which they have customized furniture and asked an antiques specialist to identify objects from the first half of the twentieth century, especially objects directly referring to the building's history, like postcards printed with images of Panhellenic Tower.²¹⁹ Inside the glass inset of the bar table, are sorority memorabilia, delicate sets of women's accessories, and a Kewpie doll, which was invented by the illustrator Rose O'Neill and appeared in her posters for the suffrage movement.²²⁰

²¹⁸ "Ophelia Lounge NYC", Merchants Hospitality, accessed March 2, 2019, <http://merchantshospitality.com/properties/restaurants/ophelia-lounge-nyc/>.

²¹⁹ Devorah Lev-Tov, "Dusting Off an Art Deco Feminist Treasure", *New York Times*, May 16, 2018.

²²⁰ Adina Solomon, "The Prolific Illustrator Behind Kewpies Used Her Cartoons for Women's Rights," Smithsonian, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/prolific-illustrator-behind-kewpies-used-her-cartoons-womens-rights-180968497/>.



Figure 4.5: The greenhouse terrace at the top of the former Panhellenic Tower. Photo by the author. March 5, 2019.



Figure 4.6: View of East River from the rooftop bar Ophelia. Photo by the author. March 5, 2019.



Figure 4.7: The rooftop lounge of former Panhellenic Tower is now Ophelia Bar. Photo by the author. March 5, 2019.



Figure 4.8: Sorority memorabilia is exhibited at the new Ophelia Bar. Photo by the author. March 5, 2019.

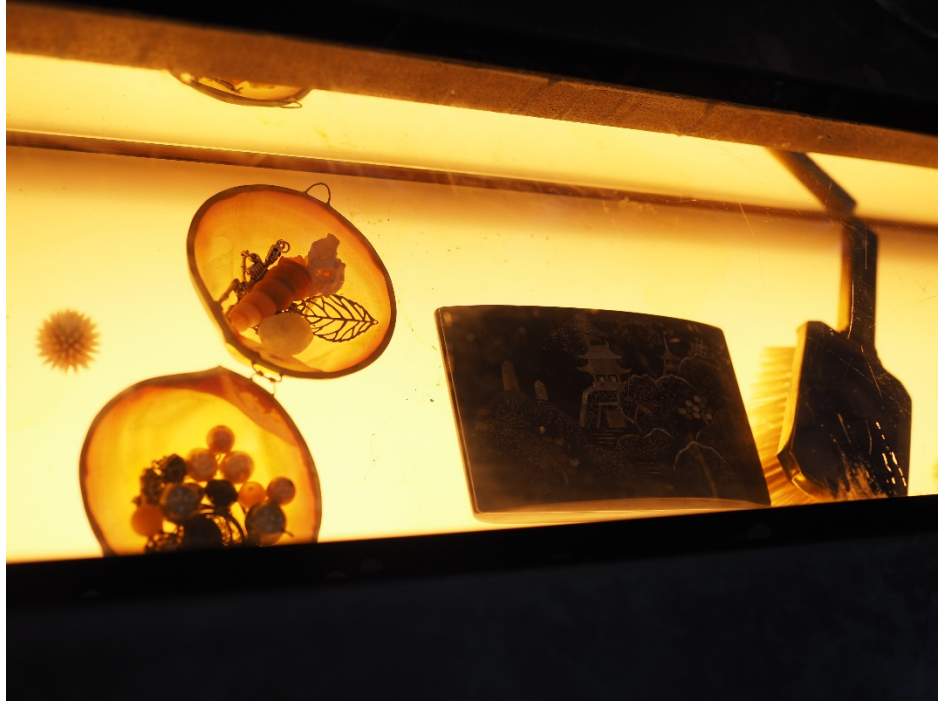


Figure 4.9: Women's jewelry and hair brush are exhibited at the new Ophelia Bar. Photo by the author. March 5, 2019.



Figure 4.10: Kewpie campaigning for women's suffrage in 1914 and 1915. Wikimedia.

On the street, there has been one effort at increasing the public's awareness of the existence of women's residences. Outside the Webster Apartments at 419 West Thirty-fourth Street, a street sign reminds passers-by of the building's services to working women (Figure 4.11). The Webster Apartments was founded by Charles Webster, who was a first cousin of R. H. Macy and a long-term senior partner at Macy's department store. Webster's idea was to build a spacious and comfortable clubhouse for shopgirls who earned modest salaries.²²¹ The Webster Apartments opened in 1923 and remains a benevolent institution that provides affordable residences for unmarried, career-minded women.²²² "Know NYC" is a history sign system undertaking in partnership with *34th Street* to create a sense of place for pedestrians at twenty-one historic sites within this district.²²³ Through themes of transformation, commerce, and community, those signs illuminate the story of the district's rich past.²²⁴

²²¹ "Working Girls' Hotel," *New York Times*, Sep 9, 1923.

²²² "Our Mission," Webster Apartments, accessed Apr 9, 2019, <https://websterapartments.org/about-us/>.

²²³ The 34th Street Partnership is a non-profit, private management company organized as a business improvement district. The *34th Street District* consists of thirty-one blocks in Manhattan, including Macy's, Greeley Square and Pennsylvania Plaza. See, <https://34thstreet.org/about-us>.

²²⁴ "Street Furniture," 34th Street, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://34thstreet.org/blog/Street-Furniture>.



Figure 4.11: A street sign outside the Webster Apartments tells the story of the building. Photo by the author. March 6, 2019.

4.2 Preservation Recommendations

A preservationist's responsibility is to use historic buildings across the city to shed light on untold connections, so that a greater and more inclusive picture of the city's history can be understood by the public. Women's residences are significant not only because they improved the living conditions of independent female workers, but also for their associations with the city's history, when it was the nation's biggest manufacturing center, the major immigration destination, and the political hub of labor and civil rights movements. Moreover, women's residences reflected the long preparation period for women's final victory in voting rights, which resulted, not from the persistence of a few activists, but from the collective efforts of many anonymous female workers.

Therefore, a historical itinerary is suggested to treat working women's residence as an independent and coherent theme, catering to tourists who are interested in women's experiences in New York City and providing a new perspective to understanding the city's past. Also, inspired by the model of Webster Apartment, it is valuable to propose a system of street plaques celebrating the history of these buildings.

Considering that many women's residences are now in the hands of private owners and often the interiors have changed, an alternative preservation strategy is to use digital technologies to virtually rebuild women's residences, especially those have been demolished, and allow the audience to navigate inside a spatial model. Compared to historical photos that give fragmentary impressions, digital reconstructions of historical architecture can transport continuous information and holistic ideas to a broader audience through the internet and

mobile apps.²²⁵ The Geographical Information System is another tool that provides an approach to handling time and space together. Through managing and geo-referencing historical data, a woman's residence can be contextualized in the original urban landscape and thus its history will be better understood.

Based on the above, a story-telling website is proposed to depict the experience of a fictional "Miss Robinson Crusoe." Through the lens of one specific figure, the public can learn the hardships and opportunities of many other nameless young girls, who came alone to New York City in search of their dreams. Digital models, texts, photographs, maps and videos will be applied to weave an account of how young women navigated through the urban environment (Figure 4.12).

²²⁵ Sander Munster, Cindy Krober, Heide Weller, and Nikolas Prechtel, "Virtual Reconstruction of Historical Architecture as Media for Knowledge Representation," *Mixed Reality and Gamification for Cultural Heritage* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Books, 2017), 314.

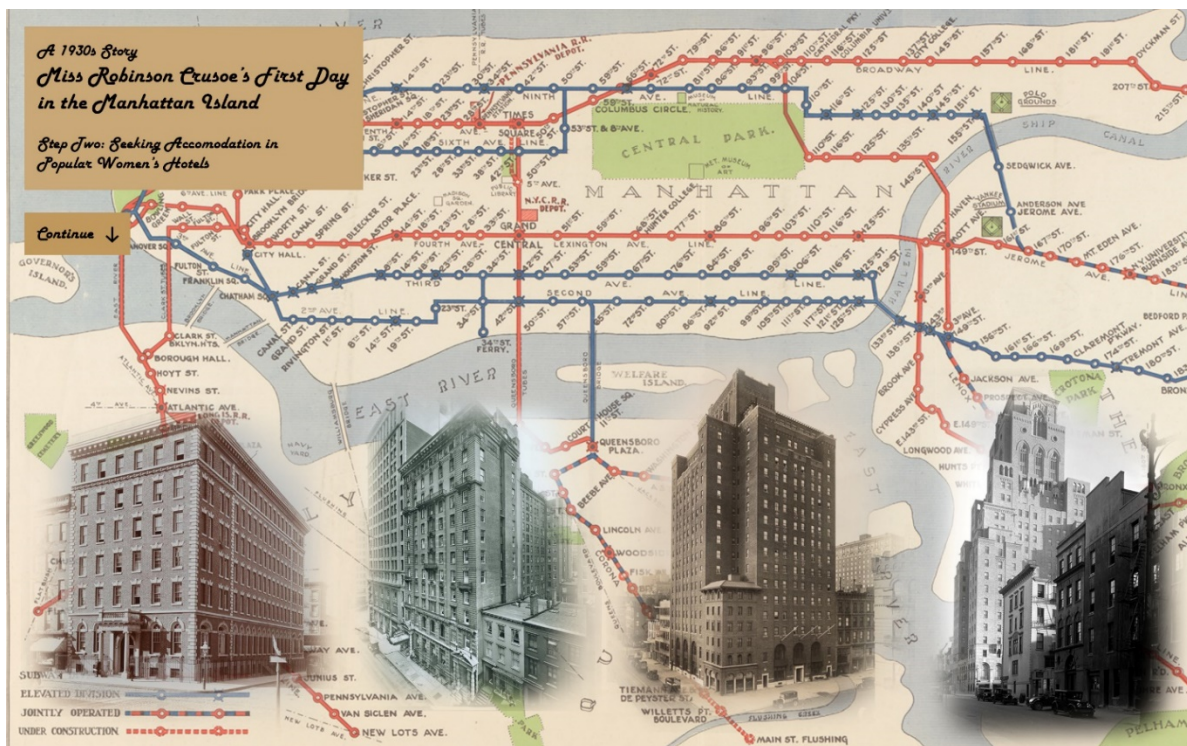


Figure 4.12: A website depicting the story of a young woman who just moved to Manhattan alone. Designed by the author.

CONCLUSION

"In discussing the rights of woman, we are to consider, first, what belongs to her as an individual, in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny, an imaginary Robinson Crusoe with her woman Friday on a solitary island. Her rights under such circumstances are to use all her faculties for her own safety and happiness...No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency, they must know something of the laws of navigation."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "A Solitude of Self," 1892.

Historically, women's entire economic and social existence was outlined by their relationship to men. To secure a man, a woman would throw herself in constant comparison to other females. Oblivious to her own oppression and incapable of imagining other ways of being, a woman's efforts were to individualize herself rather than find common ground with other women. As a result, women have had little experience considering themselves as a group in political terms.²²⁶

On the other hand, New York City has a rich history of women empowering themselves through collective organizing. In the industrial city, women's political power generated from their ever-increasing role in wage-work, which endowed them with "a greater sense of self, higher expectations and greater independence from men."²²⁷ The development of working women's residences also testifies to the growth of female power and the changing notion of women's role in a society.

²²⁶ Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 225-227.

²²⁷ Diane Balser, *Sisterhood & Solidarity: Feminism and Labor in Modern Times* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 22.

In New York City, the earliest women's residences were built for the low-income working class, at a time when women had no civil status under the law. By 1900, twenty-five percent of all single female workers, excluding servants and waitresses, were living in cities. Unlike mid-nineteenth century farm girls of New England mill towns who left home temporarily for work, many of these women settled permanently in the city. Apart from their families, these young girls lacked parental guidance and often relied entirely on their own efforts for support.²²⁸ In the eyes of social reformers, they were vulnerable and in need of protection. During this period, women's residences were initiated to improve the living conditions of working-class women, and also to educate them based on the traditionalists' Victorian female ideal, "the angel in the house," which represented a perfect housewife, a domestic goddess of the middle class. But beyond the moral intention of philanthropists, those women's residences actually contributed to the formation of sisterhood, since they brought together working-class women who needed friends to share their hardships and dreams when they struggled to find their way in an unfamiliar world.

The following years witnessed fundamental change and expansion in the roles and opportunities open to American women. The optimism culminated in 1920, when women were finally granted the right to vote and a formal recognition of equal citizenship. During this era, designs and regulations of women's residences began to recognize women's progress in professional careers by providing a more diverse set of services and fewer restrictions. United by a shared pursuit of equality, women rallied together under the banner of sisterhood and used their residences for the suffrage movement. For instance, the Martha Washington Hotel

²²⁸ Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 186.

served as the headquarters of the Interurban Woman Suffrage Council beginning in 1907, which was the first suffrage organization in New York City to interview assemblymen and senators on woman suffrage and it initiated the first representative convention held in the big metropolis.²²⁹

Into the late 1920s, women's clubhouses, built by women and for women, demonstrated their greatly enhanced fund-raising ability and a new level of economic autonomy. Within the wall of a clubhouse, there would be a supportive arena where women prioritized intellectual and career development, and felt free to discuss their social and political status. Members of women's clubs or sororities had an acute awareness of themselves as forerunners in a new way of life for women. They were conscious of their own organizational history and what membership meant in their lives, particularly in the experience of growing accustomed to "the sound of their own voices."²³⁰

The purpose of my thesis is, first of all, contributing to women's history from the perspective of housing architecture. The uniqueness of women's residences lies in the paradoxical juxtaposition of their domestic and institutional natures, which strengthened young women's shared identity as wage earners. Secondly, my intention is to enhance the dissemination of women's history to people who search for it, and also to communicate its significance to a broader audience. I hope that, by sharing the story of working women's residences, the adventurous spirit of Miss Robin Crusoes can continue to inspire young women who are seeking independence on her own. Thirdly, from the perspective of gender equality, I think it is important to claim an equitable representation of women's history in the urban landscape, and

²²⁹ Mari Jo and Paul Buhle, *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 400-401.

²³⁰ Jean V. Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman: The Woman's Movement in America, 1875-1930* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 17.

to restore the memory of women's lives and work. Therefore, my preservation recommendation aims to spotlight the connections between women's residences and the urban environment they rooted in, and to interpret them as a whole that demonstrates the rise of female power in New York City.

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